

**THE ROLE AND STATUS OF WOMEN DURING THE PRE-MONARCHIC  
PERIOD (1200-1050 BC)**

by

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**DEDICATION**

In loving memory of my father Sahib Hussan Sha and my beloved nephew Emilio Bowman.

## DECLARATION

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Exact wording of the title of the dissertation or thesis as appearing on the copies submitted for examination:

The Role and Status of Women during the Pre-Monarchic Period (ca 1200 – 1050 BC)

I declare that the above dissertation/thesis is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.



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8 November 2017

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## Summary

The lives of women are largely hidden in the Old Testament. New archaeological investigations into the households of Iron Age I have brought forward new evidence that sheds light on the authority status and roles of women in the pre-monarchic tribal community. Conventional theory perceives that women were always oppressed and marginalised under a malevolent system of male rule in the Bible. The evidence indicates differently. Investigations in the domestic sphere, where the household processes were under women's control and management, imply that women held authority that was equal to male power in the public domain. It has been revealed that women held significant positions in the public sphere as well. This study, therefore, is an investigation into women's status and the wide-ranging socio-economic and religious roles they held within a system of male rule that allowed women their authority and autonomy in a unique period of Israelite history.

## Keywords

Women's authority; Patriarchy; Pre-monarchic period; Syncretic religion; Household religion; *Bêt ĕm*; *Bêt āb*; Religious duties; Farming duties; Weaving; Food preparation; Deborah; Achsah; Covenant; High places; Sanctuary; Tabernacle; Cult corners; Motherhood; Nazirite vow; Jael; The mother of Samson; Egalitarianism; Four-room house; Niddah; YHWH; Baal; Baal-berith; Shechem; Asherah; Fertility; Figurines; Magic healing; Archaeology; Tabun; Looms; 'Kitchen'; Tell Halif; Tell Beit Mirsim; Judge; Prophetess; Wise women; Votive; Offerings; Childbirth; Purification; Priestess; Barren; Sacrifices; Sacred magic; The mother of Micah; The Book of Judges.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The Book of Judges recounts the wars, violence and societal turmoil confronting the Israelite settlers in pre-monarchic Israel<sup>1</sup> (1200 BC-1050 BC). These narratives are merciless descriptions of the tragic events that occurred when every man acted ‘as he saw fit’ (Jdg 7:6; 21:25). Consequently, we read disturbing accounts of male power and abject brutality directed against women (Trible 1984:65-92; Block 1999a:46-55).

Their vulnerability at the hands of lawless men would have had a profound effect on the lives of the women in the Hill Country. Yet, despite their ostensible inability to control the sweeping socio-political and religious changes in their world, female power is exemplified in this turbulent era – overtly, in the assertive character of Achsah (Jdg 1:14-15), the leadership of Deborah (Judges 4-5), the courage of Jael (Judges 4:18-21) and more subtly in other areas such as the implied authority and equality of the mother of Samson (cf Jdg 13-14; cf Jdg 17:1-4).<sup>2</sup> How was this possible? Why has the authority of the women in Israel, as portrayed in the Book of Judges, largely gone unnoticed by conventional academia?<sup>3</sup> Is it possible that conventional perceptions of the dominant cultural ideology (patriarchy) and androcentric views obscure the reality of women’s authority in pre-monarchic Israel?

Among scholars it is generally accepted that patriarchy as the dominant cultural ideology allotted socially and legally inferior roles to women in their community (De Vaux 1997:40; cf Le Roux 2015; 2016). Accordingly, women could not own land, negotiate business deals or take up leadership positions. In addition, women were not allowed to act outside accepted social boundaries and remained under the authority of the *paterfamilias* ([the male head of the household], De Vaux 1997; Le Roux 2015; 2016). Women predominantly gained

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<sup>1</sup> Some authors question the word ‘Palestine’ as an accurate designation for the region that is presently Israel and Gaza. The origins of the term ‘Palestine’ is arguable. It is generally thought to be attributed to the Roman emperor Hadrian in 135 AD and was used to reduce Jewish association with the land (McCall 1997; Ronen 2008; Bard 2014). The ancient Israelites did not use the term Palestine to refer to their country in the Old Testament. For these reasons, I have used the word Israel or Canaan in this study to refer to the abovementioned region. The term ancient Israel (or Israel) will sometimes be used although it is understood that it was not a political entity at the time of the Judges.

<sup>2</sup> I will mainly refer to Israelite women, but also to Canaanite and other women regarding their authority and status as well as social, economic and religious activities.

<sup>3</sup> Paz (2007:6) notes that the analyses of archaeological remains are affected by inter alia scholars who impose on the archaeological evidences their own cultural and personal biases.



status and authority when they became wives and gave birth to children, particularly sons (Le Roux 2015; 2016).

Subsequently, the women in the Book of Judges<sup>4</sup> are always seen as oppressed and powerless, particularly by feminist<sup>5</sup> scholars. In addition, it is often believed that because of the patriarchal system in place it occurs that women are at times threatened (cf Jdg 11:34-39) and brutalised (cf Jdg 19; 20-21).<sup>6</sup> Moreover, within the Biblical texts, women are perceived to be marginalised, nameless and exist only in association with a male.

However, contrary to the modern patriarchal paradigm,<sup>7</sup> some of the women within the narratives of the Book of Judges display behaviour that is consistent with the spirit of egalitarian values and authority. Despite the dominant cultural ideology, women's actions are remarkably autonomous and powerful. What made it possible? What could account for the dichotomy between modern ideas of patriarchy and the authoritative characters of the women in Judges? Is it possible that the depiction of patriarchal supremacy and authority in the Biblical writings is perhaps only theoretical and not 'reflective of the actual social reality of the household' (Perdue 1997:213)?

Research evidence which may grant deeper insight into women's roles and status in the pre-monarchic period has surfaced. Such evidence may refute scholars' paradigm of the

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<sup>4</sup> I am aware that the Book of Judges might have had numerous authors/editors with different redactional layers. However, it is the only source that deals directly with the pre-monarchic period.

<sup>5</sup> Historians divide feminist history into three forms or 'waves', each with its own theme, goals and objectives (Giley 2005:187-198; Nicholson 2010). Beginning in 1848, the first form or wave of feminism saw the movement's opposition against male authoritarian systems. It was the (second wave of) feminist thought that brought to the forefront the inequalities women suffered in (the patriarchal systems of both the) past and present societies and then set out to correct and bring about gender equality as well as legal and political rights for women (Messer-Davidow 2002:146-147, 204, 208, 257-259; Haslanger, Tuana, & O'Connor 2014). Third wave feminists made contributions to feminist theory that included both a critique and an expansion of second wave feminist theory (Enns & Sinacore 2002:469).

<sup>6</sup> Block (1999a:46-55) reports that modern academics hold that the subjugation of women originates within the Biblical patriarchal context of the Old Testament. These scholars believe that the Bible has been promoting the abuse of women from ancient to modern times (Block 1999a:46-55).

According to Walby (1990:3-5), four strands of feminism exist – each with its own root cause for the oppression and subjugation of women: radical feminism holds that males are the primary beneficiaries in their domination over women as a collective in the patriarchal system. 'The basis of male supremacy...involves the appropriation of women's sexuality and bodies'. Marxist feminism deduces that gender inequality arises from capitalism which is not separate from patriarchy. 'Men's domination over women is a by-product of capital's domination over labour'.

Accordingly, the (ancient) family where men exploit 'women's domestic labour' is viewed as the 'critical site of women's oppression'. Liberalism sees women's subjugation as a 'summation of numerous small-scale deprivations', among others 'the denial of equal rights to women in education and employment'. Dual-systems theory, a combination of radical feminist and Marxist theory, believes that patriarchy and capitalism lead to gender inequality (Walby 1990:3-5).

<sup>7</sup> Walby (1990:1, 20) believes that male domination through the system of patriarchy must be the framework within which an evaluation of gender inequality occurs and the context in which gender inequality is to be understood. She 'defines patriarchy as a system of social structures in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women'.

perpetually exploited Iron Age I women in Canaan. Could archaeological evidence also show that it was the dynamic role and participation of women in Iron Age I economics, politics, education and religion that kept the Israelite society from disintegration (see Ackerman 2003:173-184)? Recently, the discovery of a female statue in southeast Turkey has led archaeologists to the probability that women occupied more significant social and religious positions in early Iron Age communities than the prevailing historical evidence might indicate (the Tayinat Archaeological Project, 2017. From: <http://news.artsci.utoronto.ca/all-news/archaeologists-uncover-3000-year-old-female-statue-citadel-gate-complex-turkey/>). Could this and other similar findings be analogies of women's authority and status in pre-monarchic Israel?<sup>8</sup>

Nevertheless, the archaeological record is silent on the thoughts and feelings of women in ancient Israel. Despite the research evidence and findings mentioned above, archaeology provides very scant information on women's experiences. We find epigraphic material uncovered by archaeologists in the Near East, but these provide limited information about women's roles. These records reveal an incomplete picture of women's activities and experiences because they are only about women in the royal households or about women's participation in religious activities (Albenda 1983:82).

The aforementioned concerns are considered to be of great importance by feminist scholars who propose that scientific studies focusing on gender relations should start with women's lives and experiences (Bowell 2011). Prior to the 1980s, women's private lives were absent from archaeological research. To fill this gap in knowledge, feminist scholars devised new stratagems to do scientific research. These, they claim, would serve to enrich archaeology with its objectivity and accountability (Rubio 2011:33). Now, instead of studying the material remains of ancient societies, the people of these societies would be the focus of scientific scrutiny (Eastman & Rodning 2001:4).

The acceptance of this new scientific approach to uncover women's lives in antiquity (for example, the pre-monarchic period) has come at a time when the Bible is under close

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<sup>8</sup> It has been proposed that the 3000-year-old female figure unearthed at the citadel gate complex in southeast Turkey might be a depiction of the mother goddess Kubaba or the statue of the wife of Suppiluliuma (an early 9th century BC neo-Hittite king). Alternatively, the statue might be that of a woman called Kupapiyas, the wife or possibly the mother of Taita, the founder of ancient Tayinat. More than 50 years prior to the discovery of the female statue, two inscribed monuments uncovered in Hama in Syria deliver an account of Kupapiyas who possibly was an important matriarch in early 1000 BC (the Tayinat Archaeological Project, 2017. From: <http://news.artsci.utoronto.ca/all-news/archaeologists-uncover-3000-year-old-female-statue-citadel-gate-complex-turkey/>). Could the authority of these women be more indicative of the general existence of women's authority in the ancient Near East during the Iron Age I (and in pre-monarchic Canaan, for example) than is currently thought?

scrutiny for its alleged promulgation of the abuse of women in western society (see footnote 5). It is conceivable that the abuse of women in modern Western societies might be inspired by the tragic events in Judges 19-21, for example. The Bible, however, essentially a theological document, is an exponent of justice and righteousness whilst rejecting corruption and the unjust death of innocent men and women. Therefore, does the Bible actually promote the abuse of women? Consequently, if the Bible does not encourage the oppression and abuse of women, what other explanations do occur for the ill treatment of women in the Book of Judges?

Amid the controversy, the women in the Book of Judges remain silent witnesses. To add fuel to the fire, Exum (1994:170) accuses the Bible writers of the ‘rape by the pen’ of women. She elucidates this statement by asserting that the ‘literary’ rape of women in Biblical narratives are narrative that ‘perpetuates ways of looking at women that encourage objectification and violence’ (Exum 1994:170). But how much truth is conveyed by these declarations?

To my mind, feminist interpretation of the roles and status women in the Book of Judges exposes pre-monarchic women to a subtle form of exploitation. The stories of the women are used as support for inaccurate claims about patriarchy and the lack of women’s authority in the pre-monarchic period. In view of the above, I will briefly discuss feminist thought about patriarchy (particularly as it applies to the Book of Judges) as a prelude to Chapter Two.

### **1.1.1 Feminists’ perspective of patriarchy**

#### *1.1.1.1 Patriarchal control over women*

The Book of Judges is filled with narratives and references to women (Jdg 1:11-15; 4-5; 9:1; 11:1, 34-39; 12:8; 13-16; 17:1-4; 19-21). Gender-related concerns in the Book of Judges, have, particularly, attracted the notice of feminist scholars. The Book of Judges has undergone a flurry of academic attention and criticism because, inter alia, of the treatment of women within the sphere of Israelite ideology. Feminists such as Bal note the importance of (Israelite) ‘ideologies of gender’ since modern ‘conceptions of gender’ have been greatly influenced by the Bible (Bal [ed] 1989:7). According to feminists, the ideology of gender is part of a bigger communal system – patriarchy – that is a social organization ‘in which women are subordinate to men...’ (Exum 1994:10; see also Chapter Three below).

Exum (1994:14) comments that the Bible is primarily a document that is patriarchal’ and ‘androcentric’ in nature. Patriarchy, according to feminists, becomes a means whereby women are controlled and even those women who are presented as powerful and dangerous are

exploited by men for ‘androcentric purposes’ (Exum 1994:62). Exum (1994:62) expounds that the presentation of a ‘positive picture’ of women, such as the mother of Samson (Jdg 13), and the ‘negative pictures’ of the Philistine bride of Samson (Jdg 14 and 15), the harlot (Jdg 16:1) and Delilah (Jdg 16), ‘serve specific gender interests’ which are primarily ‘to control women and justify their subjugation’. It is in instituting control that the narrative reveals ‘traces of the problematic of maintaining patriarchy’ (Exum 1994:62). According to Exum, this inability to uphold and preserve patriarchal control over women results in the appearance of the positive and negative images of women we encounter in Judges. Whatever her reasons for these contrasting images, Exum acknowledges that patriarchy was not as rigid and fixed as conventional theory holds. Thus, is it possible that these complexities in patriarchal control mentioned by Exum (1994:62) are actually representative of pre-monarchic social organisation, incompatible with the traditional interpretive concepts of patriarchy (see Meyers 2014:8-27; cf Mendelsohn 1948:24-40; Perdue 1997:213)?

As mentioned before, women are treated as inferior and weak in certain chapters in Judges (cf Jdg 19; 21). According to Callaway (1999:198-211), negative images of women as evil and as sexual predators also occur in the Bible (cf Daniels 2012). The Bible, however, is also filled with positive imagery of women’s attributes: the faithfulness and beauty of Sarah, the obedience of Rebecca, the faith of Samson’s mother, the courage and wisdom of Deborah (Yen 2003), to mention a few. Biblical texts, and in particular the Book of Judges, indicate that some of the women mentioned were strong people who were not oppressed and dominated by the male figures in authority over them. The narratives in the Book of Judges also present an image of the authority and autonomy of the mother of Samson (in Jdg 14:2-5). Similarly, Achsah (Jdg 1:14-15), Deborah and Jael (Jdg 4-5), the mother of Micah (Jdg 17:1-4), as well as the woman of Thebez (Jdg 9:53) show autonomous behaviour. Although they are subjected to atrocious cruelty, the daughter of Jephthah (Jdg 11:36-38), the concubine of the Levite (Jdg 19:2) as well as the girls of Shiloh (Jdg 21:23) show independent conduct in their behaviour – the concubine separates from the Levite, the daughter of Jephthah condones her father’s oath and the girls of Shiloh dance without any males accompanying them.

This autonomous behaviour and the decision-making ability of these women are inconsistent with a system of perpetual oppressive male rule as advocated by feminists. In light of the above, I am compelled to wonder how this (women’s authority and autonomy) was possible within a rigid patriarchal structure. What was the lived reality of women in the Book of Judges? Indeed, these women’s lives do function within the specific social organisation

(patriarchy) of the community. However, could it have been a system in which both men's and women's authority functioned parallel to each other (see 2.2)?

### *1.1.1.2 'Anti-woman ideologies'*

Feminist discourse, without exception, perceives the stories of the women in the Bible as 'negatively interpreted stories that contain anti-woman ideologies' (Merideth 1989:64; cf Exum 1993:9-10; Ruether 2012:22-33; Jackson 2014:59). As an influential religious document (Bal 1989:11), it is claimed by Exum (1993:9-10) that the Bible has shaped gender philosophies (that value men as superior to women) and disseminated the (Biblical) patriarchal paradigm that persistently remains in the Western culture (Jackson 2013:1-28; cf Klein 2003).<sup>9</sup> Though the Bible describes significant accounts of the mistreatment of women, this is not suggestive of Biblical support of such abuse.

Block (1999a:46-55) notes that some interpret certain texts in the Bible to convey the idea that misogyny originated and was promoted in the Bible (cf Bal 1989:7). Nadar (2005:17-18) asserts that the Old Testament contains descriptions of 'formalized rape' and calls the Bible part of the 'unholy trinity of religion, culture and gender construction that sustains violence against women'. She ignores, for example, the outrage of the Israelites at the rape and murder of the Levite's concubine (Jdg 19:30) as well as the indirect admission of guilt by the elders for their crimes against the young women of Shiloh (Jdg 21:22). Could it be that the Israelites' demand for justice and their denunciation of the violation of the concubine reveal a morality that is still alive in the community (see Brensinger 1999:192)? Is it also accurate to deduce that violence against women in the early Israelite society was not the cultural norm? What are more concrete explanations that could assist in our understanding of the terrible

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<sup>9</sup> Bal (1989:11) perceives the Bible to be 'both totally religious... and totally literary'. Western culture has been 'shaped' by varying degrees of the religion within the Bible as well as the 'literary readings of the Bible' that impact on the 'literary attitude, ideology or way of life' of Western society (Bal 1989:11; cf Meyers 1988:6-7). For feminists, it is therefore easy to trace the roots of androcentrism and patriarchy as well as the perpetuation of gender inequalities in modern times back to the Bible. For others such as Block (1999a:55), gender inequality is the result of the moral corruption of individuals in the Biblical and in modern societies. Jackson (2013:1-28) presents a few theories to the beginnings of gender inequality, such as an earliest society origin. However, the author comments that despite various efforts, inter alia the eradication of sexist beliefs and practices and the implantation of social programmes, gender inequality in modern societies remains a mystifying reality (Jackson 2013:1-28).

I believe that a reanalysis of Biblical patriarchy, particularly in the Biblical periods before the monarchic era as proposed by Meyers (2014:8-27; 1988:24-46), will greatly assist in a definitively positive reevaluation of women's roles and status. This might change how modern women and men perceive themselves. Perhaps then authors such as Klein (2003) may be able to 'relate' to the powerful and authoritative images of women in the Bible that comes to the fore. In addition, urgent consideration should be given to alternative standpoints such as that proposed by Block (1999a:55). Patriarchy, after all, has never been God's wish for any society at any time (cf Gn 1:28; 2:18). Abusive male rule and gender inequality are in direct opposition to Genesis 1:28 and 2:18.

crimes in Judges 19-21? Feminist scholars of the Bible are grouped into those who believe that the Bible is used by certain groups of men to promote a patriarchal system of inequality and oppression of women (Newsom & Ringe [eds] 1998:xvii; xix) and those who are certain that the Bible does not endorse inequality between men and women (Kassian 1992; Yen 2003). But as mentioned before, all feminists agree that Biblical patriarchy was antagonistic towards women (Meyers 1988:24). It is held by most feminists that the patriarchal system generated gender hierarchies that led to the subjugation of women. At the heart of this debate is the purported male-dominated and androcentric culture in the Biblical texts,<sup>10</sup> which Okure (2001:269) believes is perpetuated by the Catholic Church's belief system. However, if there was a variant, more beneficial patriarchy in place for both men and women in the pre-monarchic period, how congruent are these perspectives with the life experiences of the women in the pre-monarchic era? Can these women's lives merely be understood and interpreted according to conventional patriarchal perspectives? As mentioned before (see 1.1), some of the women's behaviour in Judges (cf Jdg 1:14-15; 4-5; 9:53; 13; 14: 2-5; 16:2; 19:2) reflect the spirit of egalitarian values and autonomy that are irreconcilable with the supposedly 'evil' system of male rule in the pre-monarchic Israelite community.

### *1.1.1.3 Feminism and the women in the Book of Judges*

#### *a. The stories of nameless women*

Ackerman (2008a:140) asserts that 'even when suggesting a powerful role for women within the ancient Israelite tradition', the authors of the Bible 'refuse to affirm this absolutely'. That is to say that women have status and possess authority assigned to them within the patriarchal paradigm. The Bible writers therefore have to fit powerful women into the male-dominated mold by not giving their names or depicting them as victims in their community. The nameless mother of Micah (Jdg 17:1-4), for instance, (despite her apparent wealth and authority) presents a Biblical illustration of the powerless and victimised woman "within a male-dominated culture" (Ackerman 2008a:140; cf Rogers 2014:80-81).<sup>11</sup> Notwithstanding the mother's higher

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<sup>10</sup> Since its beginnings in the early 1800s, as well as the ensuing 'dramatic archaeological discoveries' in Egypt and Mesopotamia (Dever 2001:55), the scientific slant and focus of the discipline have always been specifically male-centred. Before the 1980s, orthodox archaeology paid little attention to those societal concerns and settings in which women featured prominently (Meyers 2002b:15; Ackerman 2003:174) and, as we discover in the Book of Judges, conspicuously alongside men (Jdg 1:14-15; 4-5; 12:8; 13 and 14; 16:4-20; 17:1-4). Conkey and Spector report that the existing studies of ancient gender systems were impacted upon by male cultural prejudices, which made for skewed views of the roles of women in ancient societies (Conkey & Spector 1984:2).

<sup>11</sup> Rogers (2014:79-80) carries the theme of patriarchy into the story of Sarah and Hagar. In the interactions between Sarah and her slave girl Hagar in the Genesis narrative (Gn16:1-16), both are seen as 'victims' of the oppressive, divisive and hierarchical system inherent in patriarchy (Exum 1985:73-85; Rogers 2014:79-80). The

social status, by allowing Micah's mother to remain unnamed throughout the narrative, the author of Judges places her in the same category as the other unnamed women who might be lower down the social stratum. For example, the unnamed concubine of the Levite (Jdg 19), for instance, has an inferior social standing compared to Achsah (Jdg 1:11-15), the mother of Samson (Jdg 13 and 14) and the mother of Micah (Jdg 17:1-4). She is possibly a secondary wife with concomitant status (cf 5.7.4.1; Tribble 1984:74; Douglas & Tenney 2011d:1428-1429; cf Marsman 2003:140; see 6.3.4.1-6.3.4.3).

According to Ackerman (2008a:140) the 'giving of names to women in the Bible' is commonly a key indicator of their 'autonomy and authority' (cf Brenner 1993:11).<sup>12</sup> By not naming many of the women in Judges, 'a certain insubstantiality' is given to all (Brenner 1993:11), irrespective of their actual status in the community. Rendering all the nameless women as insubstantial (despite the fact that there are more unnamed men in the Bible) is one method that serves the androcentric interests of the writer,<sup>13</sup> upholds patriarchy and underscores the inferiority of women (Exum 1994:62). However, is it true that the authors of the Bible refuse to affirm powerful roles for women? Can examples of this situation be found in the unnamed women in the Book of Judges, for example?

#### b. Marginalised and invisible

The ideologies of gender in the Book of Judges are interpreted by feminists as examples that deeply shape and support mainly negative attitudes towards gender (Bal 1989:7; cf Jdg 11:34-40; 19; 21:12-13, 23). Accordingly, Kwok (2000:46), echoing the feelings of many feminists, asserts that women in the Bible are ostracised and 'rendered invisible, consigned to the Other and denied a voice of their own' (cf Bellis 1994:47-52; 177; 104; Exum 1994:10; Cottrill

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anger and subtle aggression of Sarah (the purported effects of patriarchy) find an analogy in the behaviour of certain women in modern times. In a recent article, a news writer ascribes the perennially angry and aggressive behaviour of 'Coloured' women at the Cape in South Africa towards society and family members as the consequence of, inter alia, sexism, male violence and abuse, and the resultant devaluation of women [principal features of patriarchy] (Dirks 2016. Why are Coloured Women So Angry? *W24*. W24.co.za. From: <http://www.w24.co.za/Wellness/Mind/why-are-women-of-colour-so-angry-20160729>); Cf Mies (1998:9-10); Jackson (2014:59-60); Edwards (2015).

<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, Gunn (2005:29) comments that a somewhat frivolous name is assigned to the assertive and autonomous Achsah, whose name means bangle or anklet. Authoritative Deborah is given the name of an insect, a bee. What are we to make of these names?

<sup>13</sup> In archaeological studies of Iron Age I Syria-Palestine [The archaeology of Syria-Palestine is a term used by Dever (2001:60)], two disparate conceptual patterns unfold. One model presupposes that (patriarchy and consequently) androcentrism in archaeology (and purportedly in the Old Testament) has depreciated female influence and authority in the early Israelite society to a nominal type (Meyers 2003a:185; Spencer-Wood 2007:268). The second theoretical pattern (and one which I support) strongly proposes that women in ancient Biblical times were exceptionally more empowered than Androcentric Archaeology acknowledges (Meyers 2002b:14-44; Grey 2003; Ackerman 2003:173-184; Nelson 2004; Spencer-Wood 2007).

2012:104). Feminists believe that since the Bible expresses a ‘dominant male world-view’ ..., ‘the female perspective is muted if not altogether excluded’ (Exum 1994:10).

In the Hebrew scriptures, the negative image of women is a part of the legacy of Biblical patriarchy. The negative portrayal of women is typified by the appearance of the frequently nameless women (in the Book of Judges; see above), often without genealogies, which designates them as invisible, marginalised and powerless (Klein 2003; cf Exum 1993:111-112). Accordingly, Klein (2003) finds it difficult to relate to Bible texts. Tribble (1973:30) remarks that the Bible is a ‘document of male supremacy’ in which the roles of ‘Deborah, Huldah, Ruth...’ do nothing to eradicate this salient fact. Instead, they ‘reinforces’ male hegemony in the Bible (Tribble 1973:39; see 1.1.1.1; 1.1.1.2). Authoritative Deborah does not act as an ‘independent agent’ for she too is defined in terms of her relation to a male kin (Jdg 4:4; Brenner 1993:10-11; see also 1.1.1.1).

Despite their authority, women such as Deborah thus remain subjected to the influence of a male family member (see Lesko 1987:41-78). Feminist theory holds that patriarchy, wherever it was institutionalised and notwithstanding the level of its application and significance, always involved the domination of men over women (Lesko 1987; 1989:xiv) regardless of the presence of female power.<sup>14</sup>

It is particularly the Book of Judges that embodies this marginalisation as women feature in a myriad of narratives and texts (O’Connor 1986:278). In Judges, women are featured in their ‘expected roles’ of mother, wife and daughter (O’Connor 1986:278), which are exemplified by Achsah, Deborah and Jael (Brenner 1993:10). Since women are central within a narrative, they are part of the ‘androcentric’ reality in Judges typified by the abundant nameless women.

As mentioned before, these women (Jael and Deborah and Achsah), despite their independent behaviour, are described in terms of their association with a male (Brenner 1993:10, 13; cf Jdg 4:4; 4:17). According to Brenner (1993:11), however, Deborah and Jael are not autonomous agents. They remain on the marginalised outskirts of the ‘male story’

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<sup>14</sup>Accordingly, gender studies have largely focused on the socio-economic, political and religious ‘forces’ within male power structures and their predominantly adverse effects on women throughout history. This has led feminist theorists to uncovering discriminatory practices against women in the past and the present. The inspiration behind this type of research is to end the continuation of the subjugation of women as well as patriarchal philosophies and to have women’s rights returned to them (Fuchs 2008a:46). These research impetuses presuppose that women in antiquity (the pre-monarchic age, for example) did not have any rights at any time within early systems of male authority. The perspective that wherever patriarchy was present, female inferiority and subservience existed has led to the feminist objective of bringing an end to women’s subjugation (Bradley 2003:4). Feminists assume that in antiquity marriage contracts, for example, were agreed upon for their political and financial compensations. These compensations as a rule benefitted males and disempowered women (cf Jdg 1:11).



(Zikmund 1985:22; cf Exum 1994:10). The named women Deborah and Jael also fall under the androcentric spell of the narratives. Similarly, in the stories of the women in Samson's life (Jdg 14-16), they are depicted as 'powerful' and 'dangerous' and at the same time subject to male domination (Exum 1993:87-90).

In view of the above, feminists in addition to the purported androcentric paradigm hold that Biblical patriarchy has had a damaging influence on modern women's perceptions of themselves as well as their religious and social roles.<sup>15</sup> However, how true is it that the authors of the Bible set out to marginalise and obscure women's status and roles in the Biblical narratives? Why would they deliberately and purposefully advocate an androcentric worldview and downplay women's part in the making of Israelite history?

### c. The dilemma of patriarchy according to feminism

Since the Bible is an exponent of androcentrism and malevolent patriarchy, Tribble (1973:30) declares her difficulty and an almost impossible task of connecting feminism with the Hebrew Bible. She shares her dilemma in reconciling these two diverse 'worlds' by declaring: 'Choose ye this day whom you shall serve: the God of the fathers or the God of sisterhood' (Tribble 1973:31).<sup>16</sup>

The roots of Tribble's dilemma are to be found in the 1830s and 1840s when certain American women recognised the need for an alternative understanding of Bible texts other than what they perceived to be a masculine bias of interpretation of the Scriptures (Zikmund 1985:23). Zikmund (1985:23-24) comments that the new feminist consciousness that emerged needed to separate 'the biblical messages' from the 'cultural biases that distorted the freedom of Christian women'. Thus, as the feminist 'culture' took place, a change occurred in the way the Biblical narratives were read (Bal 1989:7).

Due to their perceived androcentric biases, feminists found it difficult to relate to Biblical narratives.<sup>17</sup> And thus, the dilemma began. A change occurred whereby feminists

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<sup>15</sup> See *Interpreting Patriarchal Traditions* 2016.

From: <http://www.augsburgfortress.org/media/downloads/9780800698072Chapter1.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> Cf Tribble (1973:30-31) remarking on the incompatibility of the feminist standpoint and the so-called patriarchal religion.

<sup>17</sup> During the 1980s, a flurry of feminist scholars sought to address the in-equilibrium in knowledge produced by the male-dominated view in the archaeology of Syria-Palestine. The Feminist Archaeology that evolved from these polemics, in keeping with post-processual thought, called for the introduction of new approaches into the discipline that would result in an engendered archaeology (Rubio 2011:21-24; Eastman & Rodning 2001:3-4). 'More historical approaches' should be followed when reading the Bible with 'archaeological, sociological and ethnographic data ... together with extra-biblical evidence to attain a complete grasp of the nature of Israelite women's roles in ancient Palestine', states Ackerman (2003:174). Scholars are currently attaining for a more

could no longer read in the stories of the women in Judges the ‘redemptive’ work of (ordinary) women, which was symbolised by their ability to create homes of peace, benevolence and morality. In creating these spaces of honour and godliness, women could counteract the lack of these virtues by men in the public sphere which explained the redeeming quality of women’s work at home (Styler 2010:9). However, feminists began to read the stories in the Bible as oppressive to women. It was a (male-dictated) tyranny from which they needed liberation (Zikmund 1985:24).

#### d. Reading the stories in the Bible from the feminist point of view

In the (early) nineteenth century, (non-feminist) Christian and Jewish women writers ‘found edification in biblical stories about women’ (Gunn 2005:7-8). Literature created a cogent mechanism for the expression and the making of spiritual concepts for both men and women authors (Styler 2010:5). In the narratives of Deborah and Jael (Jdg 4-5) and the daughter of Jephthah (Jdg 11:34-40), women writers understood and conveyed the stories of sacred heroines who displayed feminine virtue, piety, ethical comportment and the potency of their

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accurate awareness of the lives of women in the Bible by means of the application of the new approaches presented by feminist researchers.

Spencer-Wood refutes the claim that both feminist and androcentric (see 1.5) concepts of history are valid because of the paradoxical effect such views create in the nature of research in Gender Archaeology (Spencer-Wood 2007:56). Spencer-Wood avers that androcentric understanding of the past negates feminist criticism of male-biased archaeology and therefore both androcentric and feminist constructs of the historical past are invalid (Spencer-Wood 2007:56). A second contentious issue is the origins of Gender Archaeology (see 1.5) and the difficulty the discipline is encountering with the influence of feminist theory in the field. While it is argued that post-processualism (see 1.5) gave rise to Gender Archaeology, Rubio posits that it was feminist theory that led to its inception (Rubio 2011:21). I believe it is probable that Gender Archaeology was the natural and inevitable outcome of both feminist thought and post-processualism in a dual-synchronous flow of cause (to seek a more balanced view of women’s activities in ancient societies) and the result (an engendered archaeology).

However, their many similarities and the common principles the two disciplines represent, Gender and Feminist Archaeology (see 1.5) progressed into two separate entities during the 1990s. One reason was the inability of archaeologists to accept the feminist tag for all its seemingly negative association and their unwillingness ‘to engage with feminist principles.’ Nowadays, a complete separation between the two disciplines is being advocated (Rubio 2011:35; Wylie 2007:209-216) because, as Sorensen notes, the politics of feminist thought on Gender Archaeology cannot be allowed to impact on the discipline (Sorensen 2000). Gender Archaeology, on the other hand, has been accused of not amending androcentrism in the past and of having done little to effectively address systems that hold patriarchal power (Rubio 2011:22).

Despite the critique against Feminist Archaeology, it has not wavered from maintaining a twofold agenda. Firstly, it has prioritised changes in the interpretive contexts used by archaeologists (Wylie 2007) and is thereby attempting the mammoth task of ‘freeing’ material remains from (male) biased analyses. Secondly, it seeks to rectify imbalances in the power relations between genders (Young 1990:31). Feminist Archaeology determines that female roles in their homes and in the larger society are as significant as the public roles of men (Spencer-Wood 2007:38). This is particularly true of women in Iron I Israel. According to Ackerman, it is a truth for which archaeology provides the necessary evidence (Ackerman 2003:175). Through ‘archaeological and social-scientific models’ (Bishop Moore & Kelle 2011:30), scholars are starting to tell the stories of the lives and experience of women in the Bible ignored by Androcentric Archaeology.

mental skills (Gunn 2005:8).<sup>18</sup> Apparently, these were the feminine values that women could identify with in their homes and the public sphere. Thus, Christian and Jewish female authors translated religious concepts into secular forms that made up the everyday reality of people. In doing so they created ‘new understandings of faith and new possibilities for living it’ (Styler 2010:7-8).

Nonetheless, the twentieth century and the present era saw a distinct alteration in the positive and everyday relevancy and worth of Biblical narratives to women’s lives (Styler 2010:8-9). Those Bible stories that declared a woman and her household as liberating and redeeming dynamisms in the late eighteenth and nineteenth epochs [by non-feminist authors] (Styler 2010:8-9) were transformed into stories of oppressive patriarchy (Zikmund 1985:22-24; Gunn 2005:7-9). The changes in women’s cultural perspectives in how they read the Bible (Bal 1989:7) brought a different interpretational slant to those valued Bible narratives. The women’s Bible (1989) authored by various women writers, of whom Elizabeth Cady is the most famous, reflected these new readings of the previously sacred women in the Bible (Gunn 2005:64-65). These feminist writers rendered a complete transformation of sacred heroines into exploited victims of patriarchy.

As mentioned before, the unnamed women in the Book of Judges become symbols of subjugated women, according to feminist interpretation. The named women, such as Deborah, Jael and Achsah, are not deemed to be autonomous either despite any authority or status they may have. Being associated with a male family member, the women are placed under the patriarchal control of the men in their lives (Brenner 1993:10). But how valid are these ‘new’ feminist interpretations of the narratives that feature women?

### **1.1.2 The portrayal of women in the Bible**

One view of the authors of the Old Testament is of the prevalence of male prejudices in their accounts of women in the Bible (Stagg & Stagg 1978). In general, the women described in the Old Testament are classified as either virtuous and heroic or immoral and extraordinarily degenerate. The ordinary women are, for the most part, unseen (Meyers 1988; Conkey & Spector 1998:11-46; King & Stager 2001:49; Fletcher 2006a).

We find a portrayal of both types of women, heroic and dissolute, in the narratives of the Book of Judges. The archaeological evidences are pointing more and more to the

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<sup>18</sup> Gunn (2005:8) notes that at the end of the nineteenth century, the stories of Deborah, Jael and the daughter of Jephthah have been the featured (and popular) themes of a century of published review by women (cf Gunn [2005:8-13] for a description of the treatment of the Book of Judges by various nineteenth century male authors).

conclusion that we may even find ‘ordinary’ women in the Book of Judges. Is it possible, therefore, to separate the women from the extraordinary circumstances that surround some of them in the Book of Judges (cf Jdg 1:11-15; 4-5; 11:34-39; 13; 21:12-13, 23, which may be difficult to understand within modern frameworks of interpretation) and place them within their households? (cf Jdg 14:2-5; 17:1-4 for a more understandable and realistic picture of their daily reality). Nonetheless, apparently even in the routine of their day-to-day activities, these women appear to have risen above their circumstances (cf Jdg 1:14-15; 13). However, does the idea that women were always subjugated in the Bible appear to be a contrivance by scholars who have downplayed or excluded female roles in the historical past?

## 1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENTS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

There has been an increase in information concerning women’s positions in Biblical antiquity. Despite this surge of material, a more accurate image of women, their status and roles in pre-monarchic Israel (that might have paved the way to the formation of an Israelite) state still does not exist. Androcentric Archaeology as well as the patriarchal paradigm of feminist thought might have created unfavourable perceptions of women as always being helpless and subjugated in ancient times in their interpretation of the new data. As previously mentioned, studies that reveal women’s authority, status and autonomy have been mainly ignored (Ebeling 2010:147). The idea that women were always powerless and dominated by men versus the research evidence that states the opposite therefore begs the question of female empowerment in various periods in the history<sup>19</sup> of ancient Israel.

What was the role and status of women in the pre-monarchic period and why was it possible for women to excel despite the dominant cultural ideology if it was as malevolent as feminist claim? In light of the above, I am led to ask the following questions: Was the social organisation of the household more heterarchical than hierarchical?? Was the patriarchal system in place abusive of women at all times in that era? What type of women emerge when the patriarchal constructs of traditional interpretive frameworks are removed? Is it possible to redefine malevolent male rule as the benevolent rule of the father? Despite the conventional ideas of patriarchy and feminist interpretations of women’s status and roles during the pre-

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<sup>19</sup> The Jewish historical timeline is divided into several epochs. It originates with the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob at about the 17<sup>th</sup> century BC. Textual evidence from Mesopotamia – the Mari documents 2000-1500 BC – verify the Biblical texts of the patriarchal way of life (Wood 2006c). After the Patriarchal Epoch follow the times of the Exodus and Settlement in Canaan, The Monarchy, The Prophets, The Divided Monarchy and the First Exile in 586 BC (American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise 2014. Ancient Jewish History: Biblical Times. From: [https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/History/Biblical\\_Times.html](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/History/Biblical_Times.html)).

monarchic period, women excel in different roles and statuses during this period. How was it possible? Are feminist perspectives of early patriarchy an adequate yardstick? If not, what kind of patriarchy did exist and is it possible to define the patriarchy extant in that era? Women's behaviour is often times contrary to a supposed malevolent dominant cultural ideology. Could a more benevolent social system have been in place that was beneficial to women? Based on recent archaeological developments, is it possible to reconstruct a history of the hidden women in the pre-monarchic age. If so, what criteria do we need to take into account? To what degree was women's authority and equality possible in the pre-monarchic period? How did patriarchy and theocracy affect the balance of power between men and women? Have certain theoretical frameworks impacted on feminist ideas about gender imbalances and their negative concepts of patriarchy, and in what way? Did a class distinction exist in pre-monarchic period that led to women's oppression? What factors positively impacted on the gender relations that could have led to equality between men and women in the pre-monarchic period?

What kind of cultic involvements were available for women in the official religion as well as the other cults? And what authority and status could they acquire in their cultic roles? Were women's cultic roles and status a result of benevolent patriarchy?

What were the effects of the broken (covenantal) relationship between the Israelites and YHWH? Who were the gods that the Israelites chose to worship either along with YHWH or instead of Him? Why did the men and women find these foreign gods so beguiling? Could it have been the temples and rituals associated with these deities that the Israelites found appealing? Is it possible to gain a glimpse into the religious lives of women in the household cult? What kind of tasks did women perform in their households and farms, and how did they contribute to women's social status and authority?

In addition to their numerous duties, women also bore children and educated them. How much were children valued, what did their mother teach them and what were children's economic contribution to the household economy? What types of economic activities did women undertake? I would like to discover those primary productive activities that were held to be women's specific tasks in the pre-monarchic period.

Apart from their religious and economic lives, some women also chose to experience a different type of reality. Why would women consider harlotry (that has such negative connotations of women in modern times) as a role in the pre-monarchic era? Could harlots play a role in the history of a people? What was the role of the harlot in the patriarchy of the pre-monarchic era? The Book of Judges has come under bitter scrutiny for the narratives that deal with women's abuse and death. Does the Bible promote the subjugation of women that has

been maintained in modern times? Was Biblical patriarchy, therefore, to blame for the horrific torture and death of the concubine of the Levite?

### **1.3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

It is the principal goal of this research to launch an investigation into the role and status of women (in general, women who lived in Canaan) in the pre-monarchic period, with special emphasis on the women in the Book of Judges. Therefore, the various positions women held during the period of the rule of the Judges (the pre-monarchic period) in their households and public sphere will be closely examined.

My objective is to firstly provide a brief analysis of the social arrangement of pre-monarchic society, the type of patriarchy in existence at that time and whether it appears at all times as a malevolent social organisation. For the purposes of this research, a further objective is to understand YHWH's influence on the pre-monarchic Israelite society and to establish the 'fortunes' of women within the standards of His covenant with the people. I will endeavour to embrace a heterarchical and theocratic social organisation in the pre-monarchic household.

A further objective is to investigate patriarchal feminist thought. I will examine why it was possible for certain women to rise above the (alleged malevolent) dominant cultural ideology (patriarchy) and take up leadership positions. For this reason, I will attempt to redefine the patriarchal system that existed in the pre-monarchic era. I will also endeavor to offer a reconstruction of the hidden women in the pre-monarchic era. To expand the idea of women's authority and status, a further objective is to establish, if possible, the extent of women's authority and equality in the pre-monarchic community. Concomitant with this idea, I will attempt to find out how social organisations such as patriarchy and theocracy influenced the balance of power that existed in the gender groups. In doing so, I will attempt to establish what the outside influences were that impacted upon feminist thought concerning male rule and associated gender imbalances in the era of the pre-monarchy. A further important aim is to establish whether class distinctions occurred in the pre-monarchic community. I will then discuss factors that positively impacted on gender relations in the pre-monarchic gender groups.

Apparently, pre-monarchic women had a full religious life that they filled with various roles and activities. In light of this, the objective is to understand women's authority and roles in the official religion (of YHWH), the popular cult (of Baal) and the hybrid religion in the privacy of their households. Specific tasks and roles in the Yahwistic religion and at the Tabernacle at Shiloh existed for women. I will attempt to examine why the worship of two

foreign deities, namely Baal and Asherah, were irresistible to the men and women of the tribal community. I will look at their places of worship and the rites involved in these cults, which might explain their cultic appeal. Furthermore, I will attempt to describe an Israelite woman's role and activities as a priestess in one of the foreign cults. A last objective in this part of the study is to discover the specific women's religion in the domestic sphere.

What kind of tasks did women perform in their households and farms, and how did they contribute to women's social status and authority? A significant part of women's reality included their numerous productive and reproductive tasks. Thus, an important aim is to discover what life was like for women in the Hill Country of the pre-monarchic period as they went about their numerous tasks. The various household and farming duties in addition to being wives and mothers appeared to have had an economic advantage for the subsistence family in the pre-monarchic period. In light of the above, an important aim therefore is to discuss the various (economic) duties women performed in their households and farms as well as their importance in terms of being mothers and educating their children. A primary aim, therefore, is to establish women's authority and status in their household through their specific women's tasks.

The aim in the segment of the study concerning harlotry is to identify why some women chose to be harlots in a society in which it was, to a certain degree, frowned upon. An objective is to gain an improved understanding of the accusations by some groups that the Bible promoted the subjugation, oppression and second-class citizenry of women in antiquity, which some scholars say has been maintained in the present age. Therefore, I will attempt to address the issues that led to the horrible crime committed against the Levite's wife in Judges 19. I will endeavour to present some causes for the abuse and death of the woman as opposed to causes ascribed to Biblical patriarchy.

#### **1.4 HYPOTHESIS**

It is through the application of new theoretical approaches to the study of the material remains of the past that we could acquire a more accurate account of the lives and experiences of the pre-monarchic (mainly Israelite) women. It is particularly in their homes as well as in certain public roles that women could gain authority and status. The theoretical approaches mentioned before include socio-anthropological and archaeological methodologies, which might illuminate the roles and positions of women during the period of rule of the Judges.

Extra biblical material from the ancient Near East may assist in our understanding of the roles of Israelite women in their households. Comparative material from the broader Levant

region will provide much needed information on the roles of women in the Bible.<sup>20</sup> A new integrated and multi-disciplinary approach to the study of material remains is being applied to gather (previously neglected) information about women in their private lives.<sup>21</sup>

It is my opinion that the construction of a women's history of the pre-monarchic period will highlight women's authority and autonomy within a variant form of patriarchy that functioned at that time.

## 1.5 DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

*Androcentric*: (An ideological) focus on men, often to the neglect or exclusion of women ([my insertion], From: [www.thefreedictionary.com](http://www.thefreedictionary.com), accessed on 4 October 2014).

*Androcentric Archaeology*: In an androcentric archaeology, 'an overall focus is on pre-sumed male roles, like the (male) hunter, the (male) warrior, the (male) chief or the (male) farmer. Second, there is the major interest in processes or activities presumed to mainly concern men or where men are supposed to be the key actors; such as war, trade, sailing or religious rituals' (From:

[https://www.academia.edu/3424155/Is\\_Androcentric\\_Archaeology\\_Really\\_About\\_Men](https://www.academia.edu/3424155/Is_Androcentric_Archaeology_Really_About_Men), accessed on 28 July 2014).

*Benevolent patriarchy*: Benevolent is 'characterized by giving or doing good' (From: <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/benevolent>, accessed on 26 June 2017). I believe, therefore, that the aforementioned characteristics are what characterise benevolent patriarchy.

*Ezer-kenegdo*: The Hebrew term *ezer-kenegdo* ('a helper suitable for him') designates the woman as the one whose creation and being leads the man out of his aloneness'. The woman is tied to the man in a relationship of mutual equality and her role as his helper is emphasised (Brauch 2009:126-127).

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<sup>20</sup> Although the *Oeconomicus* was composed in a much later period than Iron I (ca 362), by comparing the ancient Israelite female to a description of her Athenian counterpart in the poem *Oeconomicus* by Xenophon (Lang 2004:188), we are offered insight into the life of the former. Little would have changed for the Israelite woman from Iron I to the classical period in terms of her household tasks and responsibilities. She would have, however, experienced the disintegration of her status and power in the community.

<sup>21</sup> New approaches to archaeological sources such as the skeletal bones of ancient women show evidence of the backbreaking work performed by women (Feinberg Vamosh 2013). Epigraphic remains such as ostraca from Samaria and Arad reveal clues about food preparation (Macdonald 2008:10-15), a principal household task of Israelite women throughout history.



*Feminism*: ‘The belief that women should be allowed the same rights, power and opportunities as men and be treated in the same way, or the set of activities intended to achieve this state’ (From: [dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/british/feminism](http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/british/feminism), accessed on 21 April 2014).

‘The theory of the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes and the organized activity on behalf of women’s rights and interests’ (From: [www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/feminism](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/feminism), accessed on 4 October 2014).

*Feminist Archaeology*: ‘Feminist Archaeology is that branch of theoretical archaeology which places women at the center of the investigations, by using gender theory as a background to discuss evidence, associations, and frameworks from a feminist perspective’ (From: [archaeology.about.com/od/terms/](http://archaeology.about.com/od/terms/), accessed on 4 October 2014).

Gender Archaeology: ‘Gender Archaeology is a sub-discipline investigative method of studying ancient societies through close examination of the roles played by men and women as exhibited in the archaeological record’  
(From: [www.archaeologyexpert.co.uk/genderarchaeology.html](http://www.archaeologyexpert.co.uk/genderarchaeology.html), accessed on 4 October 2014).

*Gender Hierarchy*: Gender hierarchy refers to gender systems within social groups that are ‘hierarchically organized’ and in which males had higher status than women. ‘Men are seen and/or assumed to control and hold authority over some or most of the critical resources, the means of production, public offices, symbolic and ritual currencies, and of course over women’ (From: [https://www.academia.edu/3210754/Beyond\\_Complementarity\\_and\\_Hierarchy\\_new\\_definitions\\_for\\_archaeological\\_gender\\_relations\\_with\\_M.\\_Cristina\\_Scattolin](https://www.academia.edu/3210754/Beyond_Complementarity_and_Hierarchy_new_definitions_for_archaeological_gender_relations_with_M._Cristina_Scattolin), accessed on 30 July 2014).

*Gender Inequality*: This refers to the unequal placement of men and women at ‘many different levels of social organization. From the macro level of societal economy, through the institutions of society, to small groups and the individual, women and men are differently placed and differently rewarded’ (From: [dmc122011.delmar.edu/socsci/rlong/problems/chap-09.htm](http://dmc122011.delmar.edu/socsci/rlong/problems/chap-09.htm), accessed on 4 October 2014).

*Interlocal:* The word interlocal is defined in the Collins online dictionary as ‘existing between two places’ I use the term ‘interlocal’ to denote the (benevolent) type of patriarchy that probably existed in the pre-monarchic period and that is said to defy a precise definition (From: <http://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/interlocal>, accessed on 22 October 2016).

*Matrilocal:* This refers to young men who went to live with their wives’ families in ancient societies (From: <http://history-world.org/Agrarian%20Revolution.htm>, accessed on 18 July 2014).

*Matrilineal:* This refers to family descent and inheritance that are traced through the female line (From: <http://history-world.org/Agrarian%20Revolution.htm>, accessed on 18 July 2014).

*Monotheism:* The belief in one single all-powerful God found in Judaism and Christianity (From: <http://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/monotheism>, accessed on 28 July 2014).

*Misogyny:* The intense hatred of and prejudice against women (From: <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/misogyny>, accessed on 28 July 2014).

*Patriarchy:* Webster’s New International Dictionary defines patriarchy as a stage or ‘a state or stage of social development characterized by the supremacy of the father in the clan or family in both domestic and religious functions, the legal dependence of wife or wives, and children, and the reckoning of descent and inheritance in the male line’ (From: <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionar/patriarchy>, accessed on 28 July 2014).

*Patrimonialism:* ‘patrimonialism mainly refers to forms of government that are based on rulers’ family-households. The ruler’s authority is personal-familial, and the mechanics of the household are the model for political administration’ (Adams: [sa]:2).

*Post-processualism:* At times referred to as the interpretative archaeologies, it is a movement in archaeological theory that emphasizes the subjectivity of archaeological interpretations. Post-processualism consists of different elements of thought that are merged into a loose group of traditions. Within the post-processualist movement, a wide variety of theoretical viewpoints have been embraced, including structuralism and Neo-Marxism, as have a variety of different archaeological techniques, such as phenomenology (From: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archaeological\\_theory](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archaeological_theory), accessed on 26 June 2017).

*Theocracy*: ‘...a word first used by Josephus to denote that the Jews were under the direct government of God himself. The nation was in all things subject to the will of their invisible King’ (From: <http://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/theocracy/>, accessed on 22 August 2017)

## 1.6 METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

### 1.6.1 Approach

The *qualitative method* is the most suitable for recounting, evaluating and comparing the publications of various scholars. It is, in addition, the most fitting approach for a study of historical and social themes for the very reason that it necessitates the analyses and inferences of how ancient people understood (and participated in) their world and how they, based on their systems of beliefs, constructed their lives (Morse & Richards 2002:8-9). Additionally, the qualitative method provides information about the human aspects of history; that is, the frequent and conflicting actions and interactions of the men and women in ancient times. It effectively recognises those imperceptible aspects such as the social standards and customs, socio-economic standings, gender roles and religion that are not evident on the surface of history (Ulin et al 2005).

The aforementioned advantages of the qualitative approach will serve to open up the secret ‘hidden’ world of the women in the Book of Judges. Subsequently, this research will be able to deliver information about the lives and activities of the womenfolk in early Israel in a lucid manner that will express their hidden humanity, worth and power as they were defined within the family units and in the broader society.

To examine the social and historical dynamics that impacted on the lives of these women, several qualitative methods such as the *socio-anthropological* and *archaeological approaches* will be applied.<sup>22</sup> *Archaeology* is the science of studying human cultures and societies of the past through detailed investigation, documentation and preservation of the material remains left behind by these societies.<sup>23</sup> Among the archaeological remains feature

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<sup>22</sup> Applying qualitative methodologies to their research, socio-anthropologists study the arrangement of social groupings in ancient societies and the various factors that impact on these social groups. Socio-anthropology also focuses on the study of gender relations (Stevens-Arroyo 1998:217-236) influenced by feminist thought (Meyers 1988:5). Questions concerning the origins of patriarchy and gender hierarchy in the pre-monarchic period and their impact on women’s lives will best be answered by applying sociological and anthropological models to these concerns.

<sup>23</sup> Cf Little (1994:7-8) for the close association between archaeology and history.

architecture, human fossils, artifacts, food remains, i.e. the physical ‘footprints’ of these early peoples that are evident in our contemporary times (Currid 1999:10). As this research digs into the lives of Iron Age I women, the information provided will be gathered by means of the Internet, books and journals.<sup>24</sup> Abundant data is available via the aforementioned sources and so we will be able to study some of the home-based industries controlled by women, for example, the foods they produced and prepared, weaving and cloth making. An examination of their houses will provide clues to how they utilised their living space.

Consequently, archaeological methods of investigation remain a strong focus in this research. There are a number of reasons for this. Archaeology as a domain of anthropology (Watson 1995:683) has gender roles which ‘refer to the differential participation of men, women and children in activities within their communities’ as a focus of study (Eastman & Rodning 2001:3). The modern archaeologist employs advanced technology and sophisticated methods gathered from other fields of study. This is to assimilate and construe interpretations in the wider context of information provided by all these different disciplines. Modern archaeology involves paleontology, art history, classics, ethnology, geography, physics, information science, chemistry, statistics as well as radiography to name but a few subjects. Contemporary archaeology encompasses a *multi-disciplinary approach* to conducting research and undertaking studies. I have therefore attempted to use as many disciplines as I could (for example, archaeology, anthropology, sociology, history) to give a good description of the lives of women in the pre-monarchic period.

Archaeologists can incorporate the advanced technology and scientific method of the new archaeology in their studies of gender. The superior data gathered with this new integrated approach (Dever 2001:64) can ‘reconstruct the activities of people in the past’ as well as examine the social roles and identities that people adopted in their lifetimes (Eastman & Rodning 2001:3-5).

It is evident that this study will also rely on the valuable contribution made by feminist Biblical scholars and their use of sociological approaches in their studies of women’s roles in ancient Israel. Accordingly, I will follow the example of scholars, such as Meyers, who use *sociological, anthropological and archaeological approaches* that inter alia present information about economics in early Israel. Thus, the economic behaviour of women

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<sup>24</sup> As I am in Saudi Arabia, I am not able to use the normal library facilities and therefore I am heavily reliant upon the internet for resources.

regarding their production, distribution and consummation of goods become clear (Haviland 1996:186; Deist 2000:143).

### **1.6.2 Structure of the dissertation**

#### *Chapter Two: Women in a patriarchal society*

This chapter explores the premise that male rule was generally a benevolent form and one that encouraged and recognised women's authority. The social and religious milieu of the pre-monarchic age is briefly discussed to provide a backdrop to women's lived reality. In this chapter, I will explore a heterarchical and theocratic (when the people were faithful to YHWH) social structure.

It became clear that women could excel under the theocratic rule of YHWH; see for example the role and status of Deborah and Achsah and the mother of Samson.

Apparently, male attitudes towards women fluctuated according to the changes within the socio-economic, political and religious organisations. I will discuss the idea that instead of a malevolent patriarchal structure (the dominant cultural ideology) within which women were abused and exploited, a variant form of patriarchy – if we can call it by that term – was operative. The negative image of patriarchy held by feminists will be investigated. The possibility that women were much more empowered than conventional academics believe will be discussed.

The idea that pre-monarchic patriarchy was a social organisation in which gender equality and mutual interdependence flourished will be explored. This system allowed women to have authority on par with the male members in their families. This chapter will end with a discussion of the reconstruction of the history of the 'hidden' women in the pre-monarchic era in order to highlight their authority and power.

#### *Chapter Three: Gender relations in the pre-monarchic period*

This chapter looks at the balance of power between the gender groups in pre-monarchic Canaan. Thus, the extent of women's authority and status and the impact of patriarchy and theocracy are important points of discussion in this chapter. To gain insight into feminist thought that always sees male rule mostly in a negative light, the Marxist ideologies which underpin feminist ideas concerning gender inequality in earlier times will be looked at. Later in this chapter, a discussion around class distinctions in the pre-monarchic period will take place and then refutations against the oppression of women will place women's authority and

status under a different light.

This chapter will conclude with a discussion about the elements that positively influenced gender relations in the pre-monarchic period.

#### *Chapter Four: Women's religious activities*

In this chapter, the religious activities practised by women in the public sphere and in the privacy of their households are the primary objective. Were women's cultic roles and status (even in the Canaanite cult) a result of benevolent patriarchy? An important focus of this chapter will be to discuss the 'foreign gods' worshipped by women (and men) and their attractions for the people. Emphasis will also be on how a woman might have venerated Baal inside his temple in Shechem. I will also describe a possible festival, offerings, procession and cultic feast in honor of Baal, the favoured deity of the tribal community. It is important to understand the various positions of women occupied in the official religion in the Tabernacle at Shiloh in order to gauge women's authority and status in the religious sphere.

The syncretic type of religion that women participated in within their household is a further discussion in this chapter. Archaeological finds that grant revealing insights into the kind of religion that was in use in the pre-monarchic domestic sphere will be looked at. I will investigate how their brand of religion conferred upon the pre-monarchic woman a certain kind of power. In this chapter, I want to explore how and why their religion greatly impacted upon a woman's role and status in her household and community.

Women might have developed their own women-specific (hybrid) cult in their household that might have included the worship of idols and cult corners as well as sacrifices and magical practices. This women-specific religion might have been based on their own needs, concern for the wellbeing of their families, and their reproductive cycles.

#### *Chapter Five: Households as centres of female power*

This chapter is divided into four sections: houses and strongholds; child raising and education food production and preparation; weaving of cloth and the production of clothes.

Recently gathered archaeological data of villages in the central highlands provide much information about the daily lives of the early Israelites. Pre-monarchic households as centres of economic power under the management and control of women are being examined. This is to show the authority that women acquired through women-specific productive and reproductive tasks. The application of socio-anthropological studies to the archaeological evidence of households have revealed the economic importance of women's labour and related

women-specific activities such as domestic food production, weaving and the production of clothing. We find that, in the Book of Judges, women were allowed to own land and probably were involved in land management (cf Jdg 1:14-15). They also performed farming duties (cf Jdg 13:9) and might have been involved in household ‘cottage industries’. Consequently, this chapter will consider the economic importance of women’s productive tasks in the pre-monarchic Israelite society.

This chapter will also discuss women’s spaces, which means the four-room house, and how women utilised the spaces within their dwellings. Therefore, the architecture of the pre-monarchic period will be looked at for their layout and size in the last part of the chapter. Their housing would not have been able to offer people safety from periodic episodes of violence and hostility. The lives of the Israelite pioneer women were not only difficult, but also interlaced with many dangers. This chapter will examine these remarkable women in their domestic environments who, despite the odds, continued to be the economic power behind early Israel. The reports of material remains at various Iron Age I and Iron Age II sites are scrutinised for evidence throughout this chapter.

#### *Chapter Six: Shame and abuse in the Book of Judges and today*

Chapter Six will focus firstly on some roles women could occupy in the social milieu of the early Israelite community, namely that of harlot. Secondly, this chapter examines the abuse of women in the period of the Judges. Subsequently, the violation and death of the concubine of the Levite is discussed. The abuse of women in modern times and its purported Biblical roots are also considered.

In Genesis, we read that God made Adam and Eve in His image. This valuable and significant truth, however, is often absent in the relationship between the two sexes in the Bible (Trigilio & Brightenti 2005:40). This chapter, therefore, will also look at alternatives to the supposed Biblical causes for the abuse of women in the pre-monarchic period as well as in modern times.

#### *Chapter Seven: Conclusion*

### 1.7 LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **1.7.1 Primary sources**

The Book of Judges<sup>25</sup> and the Bible are our primary textual sources on the pre-monarchic period. The narratives in the text allow the reader to consider the social events that occurred in the proto-Israelite society. We find, however, little information about the personal lives and experiences of the women in that period. Meyers (1988:72-121) comments that a literary analysis of the 'gender codes' encrypted in the Bible requires the application of sociological information, which grants a more accurate picture of women in Iron Age I Syria-Palestine. Other primary sources that will be used are: extra-biblical sources such as the Old Kingdom Text - Ptahhotep's Teaching; Nuzi Tablets; Merneptah Stela; Lachish and Amarna letters; the Mari texts (Ur III); the epic of Gilgamesh; the code of Hammurabi; inscriptions; seals; epigraphic sources; archaeological reports; artifacts such as the Samaria and Arad ostraca, etcetera.

### 1.7.2 Secondary sources

Feminist viewpoints concerning gender ideologies and the women in the Book of Judges within the patriarchal paradigm; their oppression and marginalisation under patriarchy are mainly discussed by Exum (1994), *Fragmented women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narratives*; Ackerman (2008a), *Household Religion, Family Religion, and Women's Religion in Ancient Israel*; Brenner (1993), *A Feminist Companion to Judges*; Bacon and Sperling (2007), *Judges*; Merideth (1989), *Desire and Danger: The Drama of Betrayal*; Finley (1988), *The Nature of Domination and the Nature of Women: Reflections on Feminism Unmodified*; Ruether (2007), *Patriarchy*; Bellis (1994), *Helpmates, Harlots and Heroes: Women's Stories in the Hebrew Bible*; Klein (2003), *Engaging Biblical Women*; Bal [ed] (1989), *Anti-Covenant: Counter-Reading Women's Lives in the Hebrew Bible*; Tribble (1973), *Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation* and Meagher (2011), *Patriarchy*.

The following writers refer to a variant form of patriarchy, the influences of which could have been beneficial to women in the early Israelite community: Riss 2005, *Why Modern Patriarchy is not Biblical*; De Blois and Van Der Spek 1997, *An Introduction to the Ancient World*; Walby 1990, *Theorizing Patriarchy*; Meyers 2014, *Was Ancient Israel a Patriarchal Society?* Lesko 1987, *Women of Egypt and in the Ancient Near East*.

Meyers (2006), *Heterarchy or Hierarchy: Archaeology and the Theorizing of Israelite Society* and Nelson 2004, *Gender in Archaeology. Analyzing Power and Prestige* discuss

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<sup>25</sup> It is the only available textual source of information about the settlement or so-called period of the Judges. I am aware of different editorial and redactional layers and dating problems and will therefore try to use it with circumspection.



heterarchy as a preferred social organisation, which according to Meyers would have granted both men and women equal authority in the early Israelite household and community.

Women's cultic activities are discussed by Dever (2012), *The Lives of Ordinary People in Ancient Israel*; Ackerman (1999), '*And the Women Knead Dough*': *The Worship of the Queen of Heaven in sixth Century Judah* and Meyers (2005a), *Household and Holiness: The Religious Culture of the Israelite Women*.

Ebeling (2010) in *Women's Lives in Biblical Times* explains why women did not hold many prominent positions in the public cult. Halton (2010), *Review of Carol Meyers: Household and Holiness: The Religious Culture of Israelite Women* notes, however, that public cultic roles were available to women. Bird (1999), *The Place of Women in the Israelite Cultus*, comments on the gendered division of labour which restricted women to their households, but which, as it turned out, benefitted women.

Probable women's activities at the sanctuary of *Baal-berith* are derived from discussions by Longman (2008), in *Psalms 2: Ancient Near Eastern Background*; Tadmor (1982), in *Treaty and Oath in the Ancient Near East: A Historian's Approach*; Steck (2005), '*Cutting a Covenant*': *Making Covenants and Oaths in the Old Testament and in the Book of Mormon*, provides insight into the undertaking of an oath. Various aspects of cults and cultic activity are discussed by Nakhai (2001), *Archaeology and the Religions of Canaan and Israel*; Fleming (2004), *Southern Mesopotamian Titles for Temple Personnel in the Mari Archives*; and Bourke (2004), *Cult and Archaeology at Pella in Jordan: Excavating the Bronze and Iron Age Temple Precinct (1994-2001)*. Marsman (2003), *Women in Ugarit and Israel: Their Social and Religious Positions in the Context of the Ancient Near East*, comments on the many opportunities for women in the Canaanite cults. Nakhai (1994), *What's a Bamah? How Sacred Space Functioned in Ancient Israel*, and Potts (1999), *The Archaeology of Elam: Formation and Transformation of an Ancient Iranian Site*, describe ancient high places. Women made vows to YHWH, such as the Nazirite vow that is described by Cartledge (1992), *Vows in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*, Hunt (2006), *The Vow of the Nazirite*, and Walton and Matthews 2000, *The Nazirite Vow*. Theophanies experienced by women are defined by Manser (ed) 2009a in *Theophanies*. Blessings and curses within a religious context are explained by Brichto (2007), *Blessing and Cursing*. The Tabernacle at Shiloh where women could worship is portrayed by Abrahams (2007), *Tabernacle*, Harris (2011), *Survey of Old Testament: Teacher's Edition*, and Friedman (1980), *The Tabernacle in the Temple*.

Agriculture was the essence of Iron I existence in the Hill Country of ancient Israel. Deist (2000), *The Material Culture of the Bible: An Introduction*, and Dar (1986b), *Landscape*

*and Pattern: An Archaeological Survey of Samaria, 800 BCE- 636 BCE*, provide insight into the social organisation, houses, towns and farms (the main productive units) occupied by Iron Age men and women. Land and agricultural practices are discussed by Gottwald (2012), *Nomadism*, and King and Stager (2001), *Life in Biblical Israel*. Milevski (2005), in *The Hebrew Ostraca from Site 94/21, Cave A-2, at Ramath Ben Shemesh*, reports on the ostraca which provide information about agriculture that were found at Ramath Ben Shemesh. Meyers (1997a), *The Family in Early Israel*, describes the ostraca as evidence of the 'tripartite strategy' developed by the early Israelite farmer, which involved the growing of wheat or barley and olive trees. Zertal (2001), *The Heart of the Monarchy: Pattern of Settlement and Historical Considerations of the Israelite Kingdom of Samaria*, reports on the bones of sheep, cattle and other domesticated animals found at Tell Qiri which reveal that the village economy was centred on animal husbandry. Lipschitz and Weisel (1987), *Analyses of the Botanical Material of the 1975-79 Seasons*, describe the oil presses, cup marks and olive stones excavated which reveal the growing of olives. Similar reports are also delivered by Rosen et al (2006), *The Chipped Assemblage from Beer Resisim in the Negev Highlands: A Preliminary Study*. Borowski (2003), *Daily Life in Biblical Times*, provides insight into the everyday life of the early Israelites. Insight into women's agricultural tasks are given by Gibson (2007), *Agricultural and Land Management Methods in Ancient Eretz*; Macdonald (2008), *What did the Ancient Israelites Eat? Diet in Biblical Times*; Tepper (2007), *Soil Improvement and Agricultural Pesticides in Antiquity: Examples from Archaeological Research in Israel*; and Mazar (2006), *Tel Beth-Shean and the Fate of Mounds in the Intermediate Bronze Age*.

Insight into food preparation by the early Israelite women, the early kitchen and the utensils women used are provided by Hirsch and Benzinger (1906a), *Cooking Utensils*; Geffen (2007), *Women and Dietary Laws*; Byers (2013a), *Home Cooking: Old Testament Israelite Style*; Kuntz (1974), *The People of Ancient Israel: An Introduction to Old Testament Literature, History and Thought*; Ben-Dov (1992), *Middle and Late Bronze Age Dwellings*; Netzer (1992), *Domestic architecture in the Iron Age*; Willett (2001), *Woman and House Religion*; Ebeling and Homan (2008), *Baking and Brewing in the Israelite Household: A Study of Women's Cooking Technology*; Ortiz (2006), *Does the 'Low Chronology' Work? A Case Study of Tell Qasile X, Tel Gezer X, and Lachish V*; Ilan (2011), *Household Gleanings from Tel Dan*; Routledge (2009), *Average Families? House Size Variability in the Southern Levantine Iron Age*; and Singer-Avitz (2011), *Household Activities at Tel Beersheba*.

Weaving activities done by women and related artifacts found are discussed by Dever (2012), *The Lives of Ordinary People in Ancient Israel*; Daviau et al (2002), *Excavations at*

*Tall Jawa, Jordan: Vol. II. The Iron Age Artifacts. Culture and History of the Ancient Near East*; Shamir (2014), *Textile, Basketry and Other Organic Artifacts from the Chalcolithic Period in the Southern Levant*; Clayton (2014a), *Women and Weaving in Ancient Near East*; Abrahami (2014), *Wool in the Nuzi Texts*; Baccelli et al (2014), *Elements for a Comparative Study of Textile Production and Use in Hittite Anatolia and in Neighbouring Areas*; Hirsch and Benzinger (1906b), *Weaving*; Meyers (2002b), *Having Their Space and Eating There Too: Bread Production and Female Power in Ancient Israelite Households*; Bulbach (1989), *The Weaving Arts: An Ancient Technology*; and Hunting (2006), *Hebrew Life and Times*.

Motherhood and associated authority played a significant role in women's daily reality. Scholz (2005), *'Tandoori Reindeer' and the Limitation of Historical Criticism*; Mendelsohn (1948), *The Family in the Ancient Near East*; and Budin (2015), *Fertility and Gender in the Ancient Near East*, discuss the choices infertile women had to obtain children. Skolnik [ed] (2007), *Mari: Prophetic Revelation*, explains why bearing sons was so important to women. Infertility and various treatments for it are discussed by Meade (1998), *The Status and Role of Motherhood in Ancient Israelite Narratives: The Barren Wife Stories and the Book of Ruth*; Nemet-Nejat (1999), *Women in Ancient Mesopotamia*; Byron (2011b), *Infertility and the Bible: Rejected by God and Society*; Knowles (2009), *Barrenness in the Ancient Near East*; and Teall (2014), *Medicine and Doctoring in Ancient Mesopotamia*.

Ryken et al [eds] (2000b), *Bride, Bridegroom*; and Ryken et al [eds] (2000c), *Motherhood*, examine the importance of marriage and motherhood in early Israel, while Meyers (1997a), *The Family in Early Israel discusses the family in pre-monarchic Israel*. The importance of children in the ancient agrarian community is discussed by Garroway (2012), *Gendered or Ungendered? The Perception of Children in Ancient Israel*.

The importance of the four-room house as women's space and authority is interpreted from studies done by the following authors: Faust and Bunimovitz (2003), *The Four Room House: Embodying Iron Age Israelite Society*; Netzer (1992), *Domestic architecture in the Iron Age*; Yasur-Landau et al (2011), *Household Archaeology in Israel and Beyond*; Matthews (2003b), *Physical Space, Imagined Space and 'Lived Space' in Ancient Israel*; and Hardin (2011), *Understanding Houses, Households and the Levantine Archaeological Record*.

Harlotry, another occupation available to women, is discussed by Ipsen (2006), *Biblical Prostitution*; Nelson (1996), *Prostitution*; Grabbe (2001), *Leviticus*; Berlin (2008), *Literary Approaches to Biblical Literature: General Observations and a Case Study of Genesis 34*; Bird (1989), *The Harlot as Heroine: Narrative Art and Social Presupposition in three Old Testament Texts*; and Bellis (1994), *Helpmates, Harlots and Heroes: Women's Stories in the*

*Hebrew Bible*. A discussion of the social status, rape and subsequent death of the concubine is presented by Gunn (2005), *Judges Through the Centuries*; Tribble (1984), *Texts of Terror: Literary – Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives*; Douglas and Tenney (2011d), *Concubine*; Leeb (2000), *Away from Her Father's House: The Social Location of Na'ar and Na'arah in Ancient Israel*; and Fewell (1992), *Judges*.

The themes above were explored by means of additional academic journals on the *Jstor* website: *The American Schools of Oriental Research*; *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*; *Israel Exploration Journal*; *Journal of the American Oriental Society*; *Journal of Biblical Literature*; *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*; *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*; *Near Eastern Archaeology* *Biblical Archaeological Review* and *Vetus Testamentum*.

Furthermore, *Atiqot*, *Academia.edu*, (online sites for academic journals) as well as other online journals such as *Studia Antiqua*; *Biblical Archaeological Society*; *The Bible and Interpretation*, *Associates for Biblical Research* were used.

Various encyclopedias such as the *Jewish Encyclopedia* (online); *Jewish Women: Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia* (online); *Stanford Encyclopedia Philosophy* (online); *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*; and *Encyclopedia Judaica* were used. Dictionaries such as *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*; *The Harper Collins Bible Dictionary*; *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*; *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary*; *Easton's Bible Dictionary*; *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*; *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* were used. Numerous commentaries on the Bible and the Book of Judges such as *Pett's Commentary on the Bible*; *IVP Women's Bible Commentary*; *Holman Old Testament Commentary: Judges, Ruth, Torah and Commentary*; *The Five Books of Moses, Theological Bible Commentary*; *The IVP Bible Background Commentary Old Testament*; *Whedon's commentary on the Bible*; *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: Old Testament*; *The Baker Illustrated Bible Commentary* and *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, for example, were consulted.

## 1.8 LIMITATIONS

The Bible provides a written account of the personal and social lives of some women in Biblical antiquity, but these texts or the available information are much fewer than the accounts of the men in the Bible. Extra-biblical literary texts and archaeological material about women's lives are scant. We find that the lives of ancient women, their lived experiences in their homes and societies are very much under-researched. Because of the scarcity of sources on women's

history, the interpretation of archaeological material (inscriptions, art and monuments) can be difficult. Interpretation is also made problematic because the archaeologist comes with his/her own preconceived ideas and prejudices to connect the dots and fill in the blanks. Recent studies about the lives of women in ancient times have delivered information about these women that had not been known previously.

It will be quite a task to get into the world and mindset of the women in the Book of Judges. According to Foley (2004), the archaeological and documentary records of the lives of women in ancient times are scarce and disjointed, which makes their interpretation of them problematic. Apart from the Song of Deborah and perhaps even the ‘physical struggle’ of the Levite’s concubine against her fate, we do not have many ideas of the thoughts of Iron Age I women and their reactions to situations in their lived reality as well as the (benevolent and malevolent) hegemony of the males. Thus, many of the conclusions and ideas put forth in this study will remain hypothetical.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **WOMEN IN A PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

The primary concern that will be addressed in this chapter revolves around a challenging subject that is women's roles and status in a patriarchal pre-monarchic period. Women's positions and status in the Bible are generally considered by academics in terms of feminists' evaluations of Biblical patriarchy. Since women are always associated with a malevolent system of patriarchy, they are continuously perceived as subjugated, marginalised figures (see 1.1; 1.1.1.1; 1.1.1.2; 1.1.2.3).

However, archaeological studies of (pre-monarchic) households – the domain of women – have revealed insight into women's control of the domestic processes that present a more positive image of women as important figures in the family (see Ackerman 2003; Meyers 2006) as well as the social organisation of the community. Thus, how accurate are feminists' perspectives of women's lived reality in the pre-monarchic period? Apparently, any new information regarding women's lives in the pre-monarchic era (see Meyers 1988; Ebeling 2010; Ackerman 2003) that present evidence for women's authority and autonomy are largely disregarded by scholars.

In light of the above – negative feminists' views of women and the more positive perspectives of women created by archaeological studies – this chapter will investigate the world of the pre-monarchic women in regard to the social organisation of that period. For this reason, I will briefly look at the various models for the social organisation of the Israelite community proposed by scholars. Is it possible that two particular social arrangements that of theocracy and heterarchy were more prevalent than others such as a hierarchical and malevolent patriarchal structures in the tribal community?

Next, I will describe the social and religious background to the lives of the women in the pre-monarchic period. Is it possible that when the people followed YHWH and the covenant law came into effect women (and men) experienced an advantageous life? As mentioned above how accurate are feminists' standards of pre-monarchic patriarchy? Given these standards how is it possible that some of the women in Judges could excel during this time? Apparently, patriarchy could not have been cruelly disposed towards

women at all times considering the authority and status of Deborah and the implied authority of the mother of Samson (Jdg 14:2-5) as well as the mother of Micah for example (Jdg 17:1-4). In my opinion, there is an obvious dichotomy between feminists' perspectives of patriarchy and the reality of women's authority in the Judges. Accordingly, I will discuss the redefinition of patriarchy as benevolent and in doing so demonstrate that women were probably more powerful and influential since they could excel in various roles. Finally, I will look at a reconstruction of women's history that could assist in a redefinition of patriarchy as more benevolent and the criteria that need to be taken into account.

## 2.2 VARIOUS MODELS FOR THE ORIGINS AND SOCIAL ORGANISATION OF THE TRIBAL SOCIETY

In the ancient Near East, the roles and status of women depended on the social organisation of the society. Since I am investigating the role and status of women in the pre-monarchic society, it is crucial to understand what the tribal society of early Israel was.

### 2.2.1 Models for the origins of the Israelites

Different theories have been brought forward to account for the origins of the Israelites in Canaan. They differ from the Biblical 15<sup>th</sup> century BC Exodus-Conquest account as far as the date of the arrival of the tribes in Canaan and the external/internal roots of the origins of the Israelite society are concerned. These models can be placed into two groups: one category includes the 13<sup>th</sup> century BC *Exodus-Conquest* theory held by William Albright (see Wood 2008a) and Yigael Yadin (see Hargus 2000:6-8; cf Meyers [2006:257]) and the *Peaceful Infiltration* theories (Dever 2003:37-53; Hess 1999:495), which place the roots of the Israelites outside the borders of Canaan. The second category includes the *Peasant Revolt* (Hess 1999:497-498) and *Pastoral Canaanites* theories that place the origins of Israelites within Canaan (Hess 1999:493).<sup>26</sup> Fritz (1981:70-71) developed 'the *sybiotic*

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<sup>26</sup> For the purposes of this study, the various models regarding the origins of the Israelites will not be discussed in depth. Suffice to say, the Israelites emerged on the ancient Near Eastern political scene amidst the chaos that ensued in the wake of the collapse of the major ancient Near Eastern empires. At this time migration of peoples and territorial invasions occurred on a large scale. In addition, widespread droughts characterised the end of the Bronze Age and the beginning of the Iron Age (ca 1550-1220 BC) (Scheepers 2010:282-283; Stiebing 2001:16-26).

*hypothesis*’ in which he describes the Israelites as originating largely from the Canaanite peoples (Kim 2009a).<sup>27</sup> Based on Fritz’s theory and on archaeological evidences that refute the conquest theory, William Dever attributes an indigenous origin to the presence of the Israelites in Canaan (Dever 2003:50-52, 72-73, 188-189).

In the archaeological record, the emergence of the four-room house (ca 1200 BC), the collared rim *pithoi* or storage jars, terracing and water cisterns are presented as determinative symbols of the entrance of the Israelite settlers on the Hill Country of Palestine – depending on the model chosen (Albright 1961:328-362; Finkelstein 1989:117-183; Finkelstein 2007:78, 88;<sup>28</sup> Esse 1991:99-116; 1992:81-104). Because they could not expel the Canaanites from the plains (Jdg 1:19; see 2.3), the Israelite tribes established themselves in the central Hill Country.<sup>29</sup> The Amarna Letters (14<sup>th</sup> BC), messages between the Egyptian Pharaoh and his vassal kings in Syria and Canaan, mention a group of agitators and protestors called the *Apiru* who fled to the remote Highlands, away from the

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<sup>27</sup> Fritz (1981:70-71), in excavating the Iron Age I settlement at Tel Masos, concluded that the colonists (Israelites) were semi-nomadic people who had an inter-reliant relationship with the urban Canaanites. He thus developed the ‘*symbiotic hypothesis*’ to explain the origins of the Israelites in the Hill Country. According to this theory, their nearness to the city-dwelling Canaanites would account for the signs of urban Canaanite ethnic markers discovered at Tel Masos. The ‘*symbiotic hypothesis*’ that is based on the interdependent relations between the Israelites and Canaanites could also explain why Philistine ethnic markers were found at Beth Shemesh III. However, this inter-dependent relationship is not what YHWH desired since it opened the door for the pre-monarchic Israelites to inter-marry with the Canaanites and adopt their religious practices (cf Jdg 3:5-6; 14:1-19).

<sup>28</sup> Finkelstein (2007:78, 88-89), however, notes that although used as an indicator of ‘Israelite sites’, the collared rim *pithoi* have been found in lowland areas and ‘in every Iron I site in Ammon and Moab’. As far as water cisterns being an Israelite ethnic marker are concerned, these were found in earlier periods and were discovered at only a few sites that can be associated with Israelite settlement (Finkelstein 2007:88; cf Miller & Hayes 1986:72).

<sup>29</sup> The Hill Country is a ‘backbone of mountains running from north (Samaria) to south (from Benjamin and Judah to the Hebron highlands) between the coastal areas and the Jordan River valley’. The Israelites could have settled on the fertile agricultural lands along the Mediterranean coast, but first the Canaanites and then the Philistines occupied this territory ([insertions mine], Jewish Virtual Library, 2016. Ancient Jewish History: The Land of the Hebrews. From: <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/History/hebland.html>; Faust 2013:45).

Previously, between the period of 1550 BC and 1200 BC, the Hill Country was barely inhabited and according to archaeological evidence, only a few major urban centres such as Shiloh, Jerusalem, Shechem and Bethel were in existence (Beitzel 2007:179). Extensive archaeological surveys as well as the Old Testament reveal that after 1200 BC the Hill Country was teeming with Israelite life. They occupied mostly unfortified settlements around Shechem (Hess 1999:498; Beitzel 2007:179) about 20 miles (32 km) away from Bethel (Journeys of Abraham. Barnes Bible Chart 2015) where Deborah, the prophetess and leader of Israel, held a stationary court under the Palm Tree of Deborah.

The Israelites had expanded the 5 city-states occupied in the Late Bronze Age to 115 small settlements in the Iron Age I and according to surveys, markedly increased the number of permanent residents in that era (Stager 1985:3; Finkelstein 1989:167; Hess 1999:500; Grabbe 2007:98-110; Scheepers 2010:284).



jurisdiction of the aristocrats in the lowlands (Grabbe 2007:48-50; Scheepers 2010:286).<sup>30</sup>

In accordance with Wood (2008a), the information presented in this study leans towards the support of the Biblical archetype for the Exodus-Conquest as well as the origins of the tribes from outside the borders of Canaan (cf Hoffmeier 2005:235). According to Wood, the Bible gives a 1446 BC date for the Exodus from Egypt and a 1405-1400 BC date for the conquest of Canaan (cf 1 Ki 6:1; Jdg 11:26; 1 Chr 6:33-37; Wood 2008a; cf Livingstone 2008). Wood mentions that extra-biblical verification for these dates come from:

- The Talmud
- Palestinian<sup>31</sup> archaeology where the destruction of Jericho, Ai and Hazor parallels the Biblical date
- Egyptian archaeology, for example, the Amarna Letters<sup>32</sup> and the Merneptah Stela. Wood (2008a) comments that the ‘mention of Israel in the Merneptah Stela demonstrates that the 12 tribes were firmly established in Canaan by 1210 BC’.

Rainey (2007:41) observes that ‘written sources’ from inter alia Egypt (mentioned above) ‘leave no room for revolting Canaanite peasants or a Hebrew people already living in Canaan/Palestine during the Late Bronze Age’.<sup>33</sup>

### 2.2.2 Models for the social organisation of the tribal society

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<sup>30</sup> The *Apiru* bore many resemblances to David and his refugees (Scheepers 2010:286), but the attempts to relate the *Apiru* to the Hebrews or David and his men (Finkelstein & Silberman 2007:44-47) has led Rainey to state that *Apiru* does not refer to an ethnic group, but rather to a pervasive and ‘problematic socio-economic class’ (Rainey 2008:51; Scheepers 2010:286). According to some, Israelite poverty as reflected in the archaeological record gave rise to The Peasant Revolt theory.

This model lends an indigenous Canaanite origin to the early Israelites. The underlying concept presupposes that Canaanite peasants revolted against an unjust aristocratic government to establish an egalitarian society (Gottwald 1999:212-214, 219, 225). This ambition led the Canaanite insurgents into the Hill Country of Palestine for ‘safety and freedom from the control of the city-states’ (Bonfiglio 2015).

It is this migration that could (possibly) account for the Iron Age I population explosion referred to as proto-Israelites (Dever 2003:67; cf Finkelstein 2007:70,74,79; Mazar 2007:63) in the central highlands. Here the Israelites were joined by groups of ‘malcontents’ and dispossessed wanderers (Hess 1999:498), possibly the *Apiru*.

<sup>31</sup> Wood’s (2008a) term for the archaeology of ancient Israel.

<sup>32</sup> Discovered at Tell el-Amarna in Egypt in 1887, the Amarna tablets are letters from the kings of Babylon, Assyria, Hatti and Mitanni, vassal kings and rulers of the Near East, to Pharaoh Amenophis III and his son, Akhenaten, circa 1400 BC (Izre’el 1997).

<sup>33</sup> See Finkelstein and Silberman (2002:98-107, 111-120); cf Finkelstein (2007:73-84) and Thompson (1999:35-37) present an extension of these ideas.

The organisation of the Israelite tribal society is inevitably linked to their origins (Rainey 2007:42). Thus, it may be conceivable that the pastoral nomadic values of their previous desert existence<sup>34</sup> (Scheffler 2001:55-63) that included their belief in one God and a (significant) ‘measure of matriarchy’ (Gordon 1935:224) as well as the benevolent influences of patriarchy were transferred into the tribal settlements on the farms and villages in the Hill Country.

Various theories and hypotheses have been proposed for the evolution and nature of ancient Israelite society (McNutt sa). Following are some of these theories that grant insight into the social organisation of pre-monarchic Israel.

According to De Vaux (1997:3), the premonarchic social system evolved out of the culture of Israelite *nomadism or semi-nomadism*. In their desert existence, the Israelite society was arranged along tribal traditions in which the family was the mainstay, and kinship based on blood relationships established solidarity, cooperation, safety and loyalty (see Martin 1989:95-117; De Vaux 1997:4-10). De Vaux (1997:19-20) describes an overall patriarchal base for the Israelite family, with perhaps traces of fratriarchy and matriarchy.<sup>35</sup>

Mayes (1973:53) discusses the *amphictyonic tribal* arrangement of the Israelites, which was postulated by Martin Noth (1966), in the period of the Judges. ‘According to this (the *amphictyonic tribal* organisation) the Israelite tribes were organized as a system of twelve tribes arranged around a central sanctuary on the lines of the later Greek and Italian amphictyonies’ ([insertion mine], Mayes 1973:53). Mayes (1973:53) remarks that prior to the Israelite amphictyony, the Israelites were made up of ‘scattered and independent clans and families that wandered as semi-nomads on the fringes of the wilderness areas’. It is only with the establishment of the amphictyony that the Israelites

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<sup>34</sup> According to the Biblical narrative, the Israelites’ nomadic life in the desert had come to an end when they finally entered a new homeland – Canaan. The precise route of the Israelite exodus in the desert has not been verified by archaeology, and for this reason their campsite at traditional Mt Sinai in the Sinai Peninsula on the summit of which Moses received the revolutionary ten commandments (Ex 34:28) cannot be confirmed. Some explorers have cited Jebel Al Lawz in Saudi Arabia as the true location of Mt. Sinai (Cornuke & Halbrook 2000). Others claim Jebel Sin Bishar in the west of central Sinai to be Biblical Mt. Sinai (Har-el 1983). Hobbs (1995) comments that some Biblical researchers maintain that Mount Sinai is, according to tradition, located in the Sinai Peninsula.

<sup>35</sup> According to Gordon (1935:224), ‘patriarchy, matriarchy and fratriarchy are not mutually exclusive’. He states that in polygamous marriages a ‘measure of matriarchy’ will be evident since the children will be ‘grouped according to their mothers’. Fratriarchy will occur when the first-born son, for instance, assumes control of the family as patriarch after the father’s demise and therefore has ‘some degree of authority over his brothers’ (Gordon 1935:224).

came together as a single people, ‘united as the people of YHWH’. *Theocracy* (see 1.5), therefore, is another characteristic of the social arrangement of the Israelites (see Jos 24:24-25). According to Voegelin (2001:246), in this ‘Yahwist amphictyonic league’ the ‘family heads formed a democratic community under chieftains of the clans’ that voluntarily recognised their authority and leadership. In light of this statement, it is my opinion that if the pre-monarchic Israel was a kind of Yahwistic amphictyony, it might account for Deborah’s leadership, for example, in a community that held men and women to be equal under YHWH’s Kingship rule.

Another scholar, Gottwald (1999:xliv), influenced by Martin Noth’s Israelite amphictyony, describes the society of the pre-monarchic period as based on ‘family and clan obligations’. The social structure was ‘*segmentary self-rule*’ with extended ties among the various smaller and larger segments’ (Gottwald 1999:xliv).<sup>36</sup> According to Gottwald (1999:xxvii), the pre-monarchic culture was a systematic ‘*retribalization*’ by a heterogeneous group of Canaanite people (the Israelite tribes) indigenous to the land. Their devotion to the cult of YHWH was one of the fundamental components of this mixed assembly of people that was early Israel (Gottwald 1999:xxii-xxiii). The *egalitarianism* described by Gottwald (1999:696-697), although not a type that secures the legally established rights of individual members, is indicative of the absence of rank and stratification or hierarchical structures.<sup>37</sup>

The pastoral nomadic nature of the existence of the early Israelites (see Gottwald 1973:165-189) is critically discussed by Scheffler (2001:55-63). He holds the opinion that the pre-monarchic period was a ‘segmented society in transition towards statehood’. In addition, he analyses the ‘primitive or ‘traditional’ democracy of the early Israelites (under the rule of the elders) and the egalitarian nature ascribed to the early Israelite culture (Scheffler 2001:55-63; cf Fruchtenbaum 2007:11).<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Gottwald (2001:266) describes the society of pre-monarchic Israel as a social entity (re)constructed by several interpretative models such as the historical-critical and anthropological models. In addition to the abovementioned models, Gottwald (1999:xxii, xlv) himself utilises various social sciences, inter alia sociology, historical and political anthropology, political science and economics, in an endeavour to recreate the social structure of the pre-monarchic period.

<sup>37</sup> The egalitarianism proposed by Gottwald (1999:696-697) has been criticised by Halpern (1983:100-103, 250-258) and Lenski (1980:275-278). Lenski (1980:275-280) believes that the Israelites were less stratified amid other more hierarchical societies. Cf also Meyers (2002a:35-45).

<sup>38</sup> McNutt (sa) reports that these theories and hypotheses need to be constantly evaluated according to the evidence as they are discovered in the present and in the future, and therefore such re-assessment may grant

In all the theories proposed above, it appears that the Israelites were intent on survival as a group of people arranged in a social organisation that was geared towards securing and protecting their access to land, property and basic resources as well as their family units (see Martin 1989:110). Therefore, in my opinion, their survival in new and hostile territories which they occupied amid many antagonistic groups of people as well as an aggressive environment and problems with animal husbandry and crop farming required an adaption of their social arrangement in which mutual cooperation between all members required an enormous degree of egalitarianism; that is, certain rights for perhaps not the individual as such, but for groups of women, for example, on par with those of the men (see Chapter Three).

Once settled in the Hill Country, the tribes elected a type of egalitarianism within a theocratic social organisation in which YHWH was represented by the civil and military leadership of judges instead of a monarchy. In addition, the subsistence lifestyle as herders and farmers (Finkelstein & Silberman 2002:110, 152) required every member of the community to be productive. The tribal society was also focussed on the family and not the individual as the primary means of social identification (Smith 2001:8). The battle for economic survival and self-sufficiency led to a heterarchical social arrangement (see 2.2.2.1; 3.1.3.2 c; 4.3.4.1; 5.1.1; 5.3.2; 6.3.3.1b) that included equality for both men and women geared towards the advancement of the family (Meyers 2006:245-25).

Agrarian communities (such as the pre-monarchic people) functioned within the economic and social organisation of the household (Deist 2000:143). Since the gendered division of labour delegated women mainly to the sphere of the household, it is within the domestic sphere, organised along heterarchical lines, that women gained controlled over and managed the economic and social processes.<sup>39</sup>

Two descriptions of early Israel, that is as a *patriarchy* (see 2.3.1) and the *hierarchical* structure of the social organisation (see 2.2.2.1) which sees men in power position and dominating over women, have been disputed by Meyers (2006:245-246), who

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them added or redacted credibility. Cf Lemche (1985:291-305) critically analysing Gottwald's assertion that 'pan-Israelite tribal league existed prior to the formation of the Israelite state' as earlier proposed by Noth (1966).

<sup>39</sup> These domestic activities were dynamic processes that varied in (women's) structure operations and behavioural undertaking (Wilk & Rathje 1982:621; cf Foster & Parker 2012:1).

proposes, given the problems inherent in hierarchies, a system of *heterarchy* wherein women and men collectively interacted for the benefit of their family and kinship groups (Gottwald 2001:171; 301; Meyers 2006:249; Fleming 2012:189-190).

#### *2.2.2.1 Heterarchy as model for the social organisation of the Israelites*

Gottwald (2001:171) comments on the heterarchical system of early Israel. He remarks that the:

concepts of frontier society, retribalizing society, segmentary society, chiefdom and heterarchy are in themselves elastic enough to encompass different modes of social organization. In particular, the concept of heterarchy suggests that we may have been mistaken in our assumptions that all sectors of Israelite society were at the same level of social organization.

Heterarchy places the idea of the homogenous distribution of the disempowered woman across early Israel in a questionable category. Meyers (1999a:35) remarks that ‘the apparent hierarchical control of men over women may have been functionally less powerful than might be expected’ and perceived of by mainstream scholars (cf Ebeling 2010:147).

Considering Judges 17:6; 21:25, it is evident that the society of that period was functionally different to perceptions of the dominant cultural ideology. Therefore, the idea of a variant patriarchal system that lent women a great deal of independence, authority and status within a heterarchical social arrangement is extremely possible. The type of patriarchy prevalent in the Hill Country that would have been appropriated in a theocratic social arrangement, contrary to (feminist-held) perceptions of the dominant cultural ideology as always harmful and oppressive to women (see 1.1; 2.1), in my opinion, was that of primarily benevolent patriarchy (see 2.1). Benign patriarchy and heterarchy would have been two facets of the pre-monarchic community in which all the various members of the family were allowed to co-exist in mutually beneficial and cooperative relationships (see 2.4.1.1 a, b, c; 2.4.1.2; 2.4.1.3).

Boer describes the system of heterarchy (see 3.1.3.2 c; 4.3.4.1; 4.3.7.5; 5.1.1; 5.3.2; 6.3.3.1b) as existing in the Iron Age I on the highlands of Israel as ‘a point somewhere between patriarchal hierarchy and some version of egalitarianism’ (Boer 2005:241; cf Gottwald 2001:171, 301; Meyers 2002a:35-45; 2006:249-250). These factors may account for the variant patriarchy in place during said period.

The patriarchal system extant in early Israel could marginalise women to a certain level. However, the narratives in Judges (Jdg 1:14-15; 4-5; 13; 14:1-5; 17:1-4) indicate that women's roles and status came with associated authority and mutual equality alongside their male counterparts. Women's status likely was made possible by heterarchy, theocracy, and an informal nature of women's work in the Israelite community and within the pre-monarchic households. I believe that since women's status and concomitant authority was more of an informal nature (see Gottwald 2001:164; cf 5.3.2; 5.3.3; 5.5; 5.5.2.1; 5.8.2.2), the heterarchy that formed the basis of women's influence are often overlooked among scholars.

The Biblical narratives do not reflect the reality of the ordinary woman and her roles and status in her household (Meyers 1999a:34-36). In addition, the idea that the patriarchal system of the Israelite culture always led to the disempowerment of women may have prevented scholars from looking into heterarchy as a possible social organisation that benefitted women. I believe that heterarchy appears to best fit the complex social organisation that was early Israel and that it can be used to describe the social and economic interdependence between men and women, as mentioned above. This model precludes the notion that any one group completely dominated the other (Gottwald 2001:171, 301; Meyers 2006:250; Fleming 2012:189-190).

In a heterarchy there are multiple structures that are 'vertically connected' which do not preclude the idea of hierarchies, but instead recognise the importance of every member of the society. Thus, though internal hierarchies may have existed in women's formal and informal associations, the contributions of each participant within the system with or without rank was considered essential. In such a system women could gain leadership positions and attain authority on par with the men in their families (Meyers 2006:249-250; cf Gottwald 2001:301; Fleming 2012:189-190).<sup>40</sup>

A confluence of the above-mentioned conditions as well as other factors created singular conditions in which women could acquire status and authority and which at times

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<sup>40</sup> Since this study is concerned with the roles and status of women in the pre-monarchic period, the importance of what the nature of the early Israelite society was cannot be denied and hence neither the above-mentioned various descriptions of that organisation. However, since an in-depth analysis of the society of early Israel lies outside the scope of this study, the focus of that society, more importantly, is on whether it was conducive to women's authority and status and where the early Israelite women fitted in the social arrangement of the period of the Judges.

made the reversal of gender roles in which women gained leadership possible (cf Jdg 4-5; Miller 2004:114).<sup>41</sup> The various women's specific tasks required them to have a great deal of autonomy and authority that was vital to the economy, religion and society of the pre-monarchic period (see Chapter Four and Five). Since we lack 'sufficient social information about early Israel' (Gottwald 2001:171), it is possible that the threefold manifestation of theocratic, heterarchical and benevolent patriarchy in the pre-monarchic community are the dynamics that made it possible for women to achieve status and acquire authority in their families and communities. In the following section, I will discuss the religious and social situations that formed a backdrop to the lives of the pre-monarchic women.

### 2.3 SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS SETTINGS: A BACKDROP TO WOMEN'S LIVES IN THE PRE-MONARCHIC COMMUNITY

The world that the pre-monarchic women lived frequently experienced certain periods of war (and peace) that impacted heavily on the people's lives (cf Jdg 1:3; 2:14-23; 3:7-12; 4:1-2; 6:1-6; 10:1-9; 13:1). It is against this backdrop of frequent violence that women's

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<sup>41</sup> I believe that social systems do not arise out of a void. Hierarchical and heterarchical structures (see Meyers [2006:245-254] and [2014:8-27] for examples) have a background and origins. Social systems fluctuate from one culture to the next (this is evident in the Old Testament, as in the case of the pre-monarchic and monarchical societies). However, common to all is the creation and maintenance of authority, whether benevolent or malevolent (evident in the treatment of women in the pages of Judges). Power and control (over their environment, customs and traditions, for example) are the substances – the mass, matter and energy – in any given society that propel a group of people into specific social, economic, political and religious organisations. It is the energy or leadership directives converted into matter or actions by assistants that determine and characterise relationships between individuals in a group.

In the pre-monarchic period, factors such as the harsh environment and climate of the highlands, for instance, created a system that required mutual gender-dependence and cooperation for the tribes to survive. Deist (2000:233) comments that the survival of a society creates the need for systems of authority to ensure the collective goals for a community's continued existence are achieved in (ideally) peaceful ways. I believe, therefore, that ideally these structures of authority or power, which historically have been in the hands of men, should guarantee the safety, provision, freedom and general well-being of all the members in the community.

Apparently, this is evident overall for women in the pre-monarchic period – the period of the judges – except, naturally, for the women in the narratives of Chapters 19 to 21 in the Book of Judges. In my opinion, however, feminists hold that in all of human history, shared societal objectives are acquired at the expense of the female members of the community wherein their authority and power are undermined, injustices are committed against them, and above all their subjugation is paradoxically enough ensured. As mentioned previously (see 1.1.1 – 1.1.1.3 d), feminists always view patriarchy as political, religious and social systems of oppression and violence against women (Meyers 1988:24-26). Meyers (1988:25) comments that certain feminists believe 'that (oppressive) patriarchy exist in the Biblical record' and in every society reflected in the Old Testament (insertion mine). I will attempt to show that patriarchy was not always abusive and oppressive to women.

lives are experienced and against which the patriarchal social organisation of the pre-monarchic community existed was heavily affected by a variety of social and political dynamics. These dynamics include, for example, the moral decay of people and their leaders' values that had disastrous results on women (Jdg 15-16; Jdg 19-21). According to the Book of Judges apostasy and the worship of the foreign gods (cf Jdg 2:11-12; 3:6-7; 8:27, 33-34; 17:4-5) led to YHWH allowing the hostile nations to attack and at times oppress the pre-monarchic Israelites (Jdg 3:8; 4:2; 6:1; 10:6-8; 13:1). In addition to the decline of morality, the recurring incidents of war greatly disturbed the patriarchal community, negatively impacted upon the theocratic, heterarchical and dynamics of the pre-monarchic social organisations and upended the benevolence of patriarchal structures in the community. Apparently, women's lives were less valued than those of men. A description of the pre-monarchic society is necessary to understand why the disruptions in Judges occurred as well as the consequences on women's lives.

The Book of Judges is filled with the ethos of militancy. This was an integral part of Israelite life during the wars of invasion and the wars of land occupation (Jdg 1-3:6; Easton 1997e; Cundall & Morris 2011:200; cf Niditch 2001:176). 'Wars of liberation' (Jdg 3:7-16:31), 'civil war' (Jdg 17-21), 'wars of pillage' and wars of conquest fought against the Canaanites as well as numerous tribal disputes are, amongst others, distinct markers of the era of the Book of Judges (Cundall & Morris 2011:200; 203).

Gravett et al (2008:306-307) describe a political or social system (Jdg 11:46; 21:16-24) as well as cultic trends (cf Jdg 8:22-27; 11:30-39) and communal (cultural ideological) perceptions (cf Jdg 19:30) that were interwoven with conflict. Violence or its threat was the defining feature that shaped the everyday lives of women (cf Jdg 4:14, 17-21; 8:53; 11:30-40; 14:15; 15:6; 18:21; 19; 20:48; 21:11-12, 23; Hackett 2004:356-364; cf Fewell & Gunn 1990:389-411; O'Connell 1996:203, 323-324; Brensinger 1999:21-22; Gunn 2005:8-9).

The political, social and religious structures of the Israelites were directly impacted upon by the coexistence and interactions with the Canaanite nations (cf Jdg 1:11-20, 27-36; 3:5). However, intermingling with the Canaanites and the adoption of their religious and social customs were flagrant violations of the strict stipulations of the covenant, which declared a special relationship between YHWH and His 'chosen people' (Ex 23:20-32;



Niditch 2001:176; cf Niditch 2008:49). According to this special relationship, the Israelites were commanded to drive out the nations and not to intermingle with them or worship their gods (Ex 23:24, 31-33). As a 'reward' for their obedience and faithful worship of Him, YHWH would provide them with divine help (His holy terror) to conquer the land and settle it, and the promise of a life of fertility, health and abundance (Ex 23:25-30).

However, the Judahites (Jdg 1:19), the Benjamites (Jdg 1:20), Manasseh (Jdg 1:27), Ephraim (Jdg 1:29), Asher and Zebulun (Jdg 1:30-31), Naphtali (Jdg 1:33) as well as the Danites (1:34) failed to fully seize and inhabit the land allocated to them (Jos 13-19; cf 2.2).<sup>42</sup> As mentioned before, the tribes elected to cohabitate and intermarry with the various Canaanite peoples (Jdg 3:5; 14:1-19). The first chapter of the Book of Judges thus sets the stage for the dire prophecy in Judges 2:1-3. According to this narrative, it is the Angel of the Lord Himself who delivers the message of incomplete land conquest and forthcoming hostilities between the Israelites and Canaanites (Jdg 2:1-3). In Exodus 23:20-23, YHWH (the God of the covenant) declares the unseen Angel of the Lord (who appears to be YHWH Himself) as the Divine Leader (theocracy) of the Israelites who will conquer the land and grant them full prosperity and peace. However, the Israelites break the covenant and do not honour their special relationship with YHWH. In Judges 2:1, the Angel appears to the Israelites and delivers the prophecy of incomplete conquest and land settlement and related trouble and enmity in person. This emphasises the gravity of the Israelites' offence against YHWH.

After the prediction, a 'cycle of transgression and obedience followed by eventual repentance' ensues (cf Jdg 2:16-19; LaHaye & Hindson 2006:68; cf Stone 2009b; Murphy 2016). We find, therefore, that the Book of Judges delivers an important message. The incomplete land invasion and occupation of Canaan as indicated in Judges (cf Jdg 1:27-36) were shadowed by the Israelites' persistent inability to maintain continuity in their moral code, the worship of YHWH and the avoidance of inter-tribal conflict (Guzik 2003a; cf

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<sup>42</sup> This situation is a contradiction to what is said in Jos 1-12. It seems that the Canaanites regrouped and again gained their strength after the first occupation by the Israelite tribes – we are not sure what happened. However, it is probable that the violation of the covenant, reaffirmed in Joshua 24, led to the disintegration of a cohesive tribal community established through it. This meant that they could not effectively combat an emboldened Canaanite military assault. In other words, the denial of YHWH's grace led to Israelite disgrace.

Gill 2012f; Pett 2013g). This inexorably leads the Israelites to the brink of self-destruction in the final chapter of Judges (Cundall & Morris 2011:200). Among the dire consequence of covenantal and moral decay in Judges was the death and abuse of the women (in Judges 19-21). Patriarchy thus becomes detrimental to women.

During this series of idolatry and transgressions (Jdg 2:14-15; LaHaye & Hindson 2006:68), YHWH raised up judges (Jdg 2:16; 3:10; 4:1-5; 6:1; 10:2-3). They would procure deliverance from the oppression of the Canaanites and revive the faith of the Israelites in YHWH (Niditch 2001:176).

From the prophecy in Judges 2:1, we may further gather that the distressing accounts of violence and crimes that interrupted and ended precious women's lives was the consequence of the failure of the Israelites to obey the Mosaic covenant (Ex 23:20-33; LaHaye & Hindson 2006:68-69; cf 2.3.3; 4.3.1). The violation of the covenant, according to the Book of Judges, inevitably led to the social and political upheavals that are pervasive elements of the pre-monarchic period. It is essential to note that the violence used against the women in Judges 11:39 and 19-21 therefore cannot only be perceived as the result of a continually oppressive patriarchal system (Fewell & Gunn 1990:406). These occurrences should also be considered in context of the turbulent transformations within the political, social and religious spheres of the Israelite tribal system. It is against this backdrop that the cycle of backsliding, repentance and return to YHWH plays itself out until it finally descends into the lowest depths of communal morality and individual corruption (Jdg 21:25). Seemingly, the autonomy of women and their roles and status are somehow lost and overlooked (by scholars) for the conflict and hostilities within the tribal communities deflect attention away from the powerful and assertive women and their contributions to their community that assisted in its preservation.

Niditch (2000:176) comments that 'the tales of Israel's insurgency feature various heroes' including Ehud the left-handed (non-ideal body because he is left-handed) warrior, the prophet Deborah and Barak, Jael the female slayer of Sisera, the Canaanite general, Gideon who destroyed the altar of Baal, Jephthah, and Samson (Niditch 2001:176; cf Cundall & Morris 2011:201-203). According to Le Roux (2015; 2016), the appearance of women as heroes in Judges is contrary to the dominant cultural ideology (see Van der Merwe & Coetzee 2009:677-694). Women such as Deborah (the non-preferred body) are

elevated to an equivalent status (see 2.3.3.2). A subtle criticism is levelled against the patriarchal system for the creation of gender inequality by the authors/editors of Judges (see 2.3.3.2; Le Roux 2015; 2016). The Book of Judges thus deals with those important socio-religious issues that accentuated the Israelite mindset and through which their valuations of inter alia God, war and gender (women) became clear (Niditch 2001:176; cf Table 2.1 below that shows an outline of the Book of Judges). These thoughts and values had a great impact on women since through them women were exposed to the dominant cultural ideology (patriarchy). However, the proto-Israelites' relationship with YHWH also had an influence on women's roles and status during the pre-monarchic period. Apparently, while the covenant relationship with YHWH was upheld, women enjoyed greater freedom, status and authority concomitant to their roles in the community. On the other hand, academics, feminists in particular, (see 2.1) have always maintained a negative view of 'the rule of the father' that is patriarchy.

Table 2.1 Structural outline of Judges (Wong 2012)<sup>43</sup>

A. Double Introduction	B. The Era of the Judges			C. Conclusion	
1. Background to the period of the judges	Jdg 1:3-6	1. Othniel	Jdg 3:7-11	Disorder in Society	Jdg 17:1-21:25
		2. Ehud	Jdg 3:12-30	1. In the religious and	Jdg 17:1-18:31
		3. Shamgar	Jdg 3:31	military spheres	
2. Military Disasters	Jdg 1:1-2:5	4. Deborah and Barak	Jdg 4:1-5:31		
		5. Gideon	Jdg 6:1-8:35	2. In the spheres of communal	Jdg 19:1-21:25
3. Spiritual Collapse	Jdg 2:6-3:6	6. Abimelech	Jdg 9:1-57	norms and political judgements	
		7. Tola and Jair	Jdg 10:1-5		
		8. Jephthah	Jdg 10:6-12:7		
		9. Ibzan, Elon and Abdon	Jdg 12:8-15		
		10. Samson	Jdg 12:1-16:31		

### 2.3.1 The traditional understanding of the 'rule of the father' (patriarchy)

It is against this religious and social backdrop (see above 2.3) within which the dominant cultural ideology existed. As mentioned before (cf 1.1; 1.1.1; 1.1.1.1-1.1.1.3 a, b, c, d) [feminist] scholars interpret the dominant cultural ideology (the patriarchal organisation) of the pre-monarchic period as a system of male dominance that was perpetually oppressive

<sup>43</sup> Abimelech was not a judge but a powerful military leader. I presume that this is why he is included in Wong's Outline. Wong divides the Book of Judges into three parts: a double introduction, which provides a background to the spiritual deterioration of tribal life. This state of affairs necessitates the era in which judges ruled, followed by a conclusion to the Book that ends in intertribal war and further societal collapse characterised by inter alia the abuse of certain women in Chapters 19 to 21.

and abusive of women. Within the patriarchal system women were expected to fill the roles of mothers and wives, which are generally held to have been of a secondary nature to the roles of fathers and husbands (see 1.1). However, patriarchy in the pre-monarchic period as depicted in certain narratives in the Book of Judges (cf Jdg 1:11-15; 4-5; 13; 14:1-5; 17:1-4) appear to be different, probably as a result of theocracy.

In this segment, it is important to understand how certain scholars (feminist and non-feminist) interpret the word patriarchy in order to have a fuller comprehension of what, according to them, the system entailed.

In the literal sense of the word, patriarchy is understood to mean 'the rule of the father' (Ruether 2007:1104; Meagher 2011:441). It is a term directly translated from the Greek words *pater* (father) and *archo* (rule) and its various denotations make it difficult to understand the term (Meyers 2014:9).<sup>44</sup> Described as a social system of male governance over all aspects of private and public domains, early patriarchy<sup>45</sup> is also defined as the

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<sup>44</sup> Later I will use the Hebrew equivalent of the *paterfamilias* that is *bêt āb* (see 2.4.1.2-2.4.1.3). In this segment, however, I will use the term *paterfamilias* to try to give a good description of the head of a family in the pre-monarchic period. It is hard to understand accurately the term *paterfamilias* (or *bêt āb*) which may be in itself an indication of the variant form of 'patriarchy' operative in pre-monarchic Canaan.

<sup>45</sup> It is important to understand the origins and consequences of patriarchy to understand the occurrence of the phenomenon in the Bible and in modernity. I believe that women's authority and egalitarian values that appear in the pre-monarchic Israelite community were retained from earlier generations of women as well as the theocratic social organisation.

The traditional view, however, is that male rule was the dominant social structure in the ancient Near East by 3000 BC (Matthews 2003a:1). By the third millennium BC, patriarchy as structured authority assumed control over both men and women in the Israelite society and in the Near East and extended deeply into the complex political, socio-economic and legal arrangements of their lives (Ruether 2007:1104).

The Nuzi tablets ca 1450 BC-1350 BC recorded patriarchal practices of the Hurrian society that were common in the ancient Near East and that resemble those in Genesis. Wood (2006a) equates the Hurrians with the Horites in the Old Testament. Archaeologists have discovered at Nuzi, a Hurrian administrative centre in northern Iraq, about 5000 tablets that recorded aspects of the Hurrian social, religious, economic and legal systems (cf Gordon 1936).

One such practice, the adoption of woman as a sister by a man, may be a reason why Abraham (Gn 12:10, 20:1) and Isaac (Gn 26:7) claimed their wives to be their sisters. Apparently, a wife's status was elevated, and she also had greater protection as a legal sister of her husband [that is to say within a system that was ordinarily oppressive to women] (Wood 2006a).

These tablets indicate that many women of different rank enjoyed enhanced status and economic wealth (Gordon 1936). I believe that, contained within the Israelite theocracy, women's status and authority analogous to that shown by the Nuzi tablets were an integral part of Israelite life in the pre-monarchic period. Women's authority and autonomy were prominently underpinned by the Israelites religious ideology (cf Gn 1:28; 2:18; 17:15). Conventional theory holds that a transformation occurred within the Neolithic Age that signified a great alteration in the (relative egalitarian) relationship between the two genders.

It is explicit male domination born out of the socio-economic and political conditions of that epoch more than anything that redefined and reshaped this affiliation and stripped women of their status as co-builders of civilization (Lerner 1986:49-50). For the Israelite women, however, this was a transformation that was delayed until after the pre-monarchic period.

monocratic control of the *paterfamilias* of a family or the ‘absolute power held by the headman of a family or a clan’ (De Blois & Van Der Spek 1997:147; Riss 2005; Meagher 2011:441; Perry 2014:131).<sup>46</sup> *Paterfamilias* by its very definition is the most appropriate word to describe the status of the leader of a group or a family. The term *paterfamilias* is of (an archaic) Latin origin and is interpreted as ‘head of the household’; that is the oldest male descendant in a patrilineal heritage (Perry 2014:131). The rule of the *paterfamilias* is also described by Ruether (2007:441) as the ‘basic principle of social organization of the family and the society as a whole’ (cf Meagher 2011:441). Ruether’s definition of patriarchy is based on Weber’s (1947:59-63) concept of patriarchy as ‘systems of traditional authority’. It is generally assumed that such a system of traditional governance in which power is in the hands of men is in place in the pre-monarchic period.

For feminists, male power is always utilised to oppress women, marginalising their lives to secondary and shadowy figures. Following, I will give a brief description of the women in the Book of Judges to whom feminists have ascribed the abovementioned labels of oppression and marginalization. In addition, I will give an account of feminists’ view regarding the women and the patriarchal world that they inhabited in Judges.

### 2.3.2 Characteristics of the women in the Book of Judges

O’Connor (1986:277) analogises the limited texts related to female characters in the Pentateuch, for example, to the multiple appearances of women in the Book of Judges, which is brimming with ‘stories involving women’ (cf Brenner 1993:9; Hackett 2004:356-364; Gunn 2005:8-10, 13-14; Bacon & Sperling 2007:561-562; Ackerman 2008a:140).

The Book of Judges, while not exactly overflowing with narratives that feature women in great detail, does indeed present more stories about women than in the majority of the books in the Old Testament. In Judges 1, assertive Achsah appears (Jdg 1:11-15), followed by authoritative and victorious Delilah and Jael (Jdg 4-5), the mother of Sisera and her ladies-in-waiting (Jdg 5:29-30). In Judges 9:53 we encounter the valiant woman of Thebez who killed Abimelech with her millstone. In Judges 11:34-40 we are faced with the tragedy of the daughter of Jephthah, who is sacrificed by her injudicious father, and her

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<sup>46</sup> Cornell (1995:286), Vidaurrázaga (2007:69) and Anderson (2009:27) discuss the extent of the power of the *paterfamilias* in the ancient Roman society.

faithful and compassionate female entourage. The mother of Jephthah is non-judgmentally declared a prostitute in Judges 11:1. The daughters and daughters-in-law of Ibzan are mentioned as brides in Judges 12:9. The story of the barren mother of Samson is narrated in Judges 13. The mother of Samson's extraordinary experience with the Angel of the Lord and subsequently her authority, after the birth of Samson, is understood in Judges 14:2-5.

In contrast to feminist held views of the powerless pre-monarchic women, (non-feminist scholar) Le Roux (2016), comments that the authority of the mother of Samson is already revealed in the manner that the Angel of the Lord shows her respect as He conveys the message of the imminent birth of a long-awaited son to her. The authority of the mother of Samson is in contrast to the dominant cultural ideology of that time (cf Jdg 13; Le Roux 2016). In my opinion, the contrast is revealed when the patriarchal structures become a negative entity for both men and women during times of war (see 2.3) and or the moral corruption of the people (see 6.3.2 a, b, c, d e; 6.3.4.2-6.3.4.3). The wife of Samson is mentioned in Judges 14:1, her betrayal of Samson in Judges 14:15-18 and her death in Judges 15:6. Another prostitute is mentioned in Judges 16:1, and shortly thereafter the story of Delilah and Samson is recounted (Jdg 16:4-20). In Judges 17:1-4 the disgruntled and wealthy mother of Micah makes her appearance. The distressing account of the concubine of the Levite is told in Judges 19:1-30. In Judges 20:48 the slaughter of the Benjamite women are alluded to, and there are direct references to the captures and forcible marriages of the young women of Jabesh Gilead (Jdg 21:12-13) and Shiloh (Jdg 21:20, 23) (Brenner 1993:9; Bacon & Sperling 2007:561; cf Murphy 2016).

### *2.3.2.1 Feminists perceptions of women and the pre-monarchic world they inhabited*

#### *a. The women in the Book of Judges according to the feminist view*

From a feminist perspective, Brenner records '19 female personae or collective personae in all' (of whom only four are named: Achsah, Deborah, Jael and Delilah), many of whom have received a great deal of 'attention from feminist critics' (Brenner 1993:9). The feminist approach (see 1.1; 1.1.1; 1.1.1.1-1.1.1.3 a, b, c, d) in the discussions of the women in the Book of Judges has always been geared towards the 'strong androcentric premises'

that underlie these texts (Brenner 1993:9).<sup>47</sup> The evidence for androcentric bias is found, for example, in many of the female characters in Judges who are nameless and solely defined in terms of a 'male figure' (cf Table 2.2 below).

Table 2.2 Categories of nameless female figures in the Book of Judges (Brenner 1993:10)

1. Women mentioned in association with male figure					No of women		
Father	the daughter of Jephthah, the daughters and daughters-in-law of Ibzan				3		
Son	the mother of Sisera, the mother of Jephthah, the mother of Samson				4		
	the mother of Micah						
Husband	the concubine of Gideon, the wife of Samson, the concubine of the Levite				3		
Total					10		
2. Women to whom independent roles are ascribed							
the female entourage of Sisera's mother					1		
the assassin of Abimelech					1		
the prostitute from Gaza (Jdg 16:1)					1		
Total					3 women/groups		
3. Women mentioned in terms of their spatial relationship							
the women of Jabesh Gilead, the women of Shiloh					2		
Total					2 groups		

<sup>47</sup> Feminists have accentuated the importance of the origins of gender ideologies (see Chapter Three) and disparities to understand and rectify these imbalances in modernity (Meyers 1988:8). The perception that women in Biblical times were oppressed members of their society starts with the idea that the earliest human groups were matriarchal societies in which people enjoyed equality and harmony under the benevolent rule of women leaders.

A transformation occurred in these societies when the peaceful authority of women was taken over by warlike male authority. It was the creation and maintenance of malevolent male authority and the continuity of it throughout history from Biblical times into modern times that is of specific concern to feminists. For the possible origins of male aggression, it is held that the man and the women in the first chapters of Genesis are metaphors for the earliest societies.

I will therefore apply to the discussion of this first society in the Bible some socio-anthropological ideas that go with the traditional views of the origins of patriarchy. The consequences of patriarchy are also important and thus merit a discussion. By bringing these themes to light, we may have a better understanding of how feminists view the world of men and women in the Book of Judges.

I believe that the interactions between the men and the women in the pre-monarchic period were inter alia based on Genesis 1:28 and 2:18. I also believe that early men and women (in the pre-monarchic Israelite society) both had authority which was vital for the survival of their household and communities. Friction between men and women occurred when there was an erosion in the balance of power between them. In my opinion, in the history of the Israelite tribal society in the pre-monarchic era, the equilibrium between men and women particularly was disturbed when the people abandoned their faith in YHWH and His theocratic rule.

Eventually, when the social, economic and political dynamics within the Israelite community changed and all the power and control were transferred to men in the monarchic era, women became oppressed (see Bird 1999:3-20).

Brenner comments that by rendering the female characters nameless, the writer of the Book of Judges ostensibly wishes to ascribe a certain powerlessness to these women. One reason for portraying women as helpless is to uphold the patriarchal values within the Israelite community (Brenner 1993:11; cf Hackett 2004:356-364; Ackerman 2008a:140; Rogers 2014:80-81).<sup>48</sup>

Subsequently, we find that the lives of the women in the Book of Judges usually are negatively defined within the patriarchal parameters of feminist perception (Meyers 1988:24).<sup>49</sup> It is ironic that any vestige of women's authority and equality that are being

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<sup>48</sup>Reinhartz (1998:9-13) discusses anonymous people in the Biblical narrative. The roles and status of women in the Book of Judges have continuously been placed under the close and enduring inspection of a certain traditional model. That is the feminist cultural interpretational context of androcentric bias and canonical (Biblical) patriarchy in the Old Testament (Meyers 1988:23-26; Merideth 1989:63; Brenner 1993:9-23; cf Bal 1989:15-18). The 'social science theory' that defines the patriarchal paradigm has been adopted since the nineteenth century to interpret the cultural environment of the Biblical narratives, and in particular those texts in which women predominate (Meyers 2014:8-27).

Consequently, the principles of androcentric and patriarchal systems and customs in view of the lived experiences and needs of women in the Book of Judges, for example, have been challenged and re-evaluated by feminists (Finley 1988:352). Despite the diversity of feminist philosophy which incorporates liberal, radical, Marxist and socialist strands, feminists' ideology regarding (Biblical) patriarchy parallel each other (Finley 1988:352).

For a more detailed discussion of feminist hermeneutics that incorporates a variety of methodologies for Biblical interpretation, see Murphy (2016) as well as Russel [ed] (1985) and the discussion of feminist interpretation of the Bible by various writers in her book. Ruether (2007:1104) describes the patriarchal paradigm as the influential rule of male leadership figures over families and those legal, economic, social and political stimuli in society that endorse and reinforce male domination.

This idea, in general, depicts feminists' perception of male rule in antiquity. Bellis (1994:51) admits that not all feminist interpreters are satisfied with the word 'patriarchy', but Bellis (in keeping with feminist tradition) uses it in 'its generally accepted meaning of "male dominated" and "oppression of woman"' (Bellis 1994:51). Within this context, patriarchy, according to mainstream feminists, also comprises 'androcentrism, misogyny and sexism' (Bellis 1994:50-51).

<sup>49</sup> There exists the view that male ascendancy materialised out of prehistoric populations (Marler 2006). Feminist theory proposes that the earliest societies such as the 'prehistorian Anatolian site Çatal Hüyük in the 7<sup>th</sup> millennium' were matriarchies. Lerner (1986) 'describes patriarchy from a so called matriarchal society dating back to as early as Çatal Hüyük in the 7<sup>th</sup> millennium BC' (Chavalas 2014:4). Lerner, however, has been criticised by Frymer-Kensky (1992) for 'faulty use of empirical data' and a lack of 'command of the primary sources' (Chavalas 2014:4).

In his publication, *Mother Right: An Investigation of the Religious and Juridical Character of Matriarchy in the Ancient World* (1967), Johann Jakob Bachofen proposes the matriarchal origins of human society and religion. That is to say the earliest human societies where under the rule of women rather than men (New World Encyclopedia contributors 2012; cf Bachofen 1967:69-201). Religion in these early matriarchies was in essence the worship of the mother goddess. In later societies under male rule, goddess worship was transformed into the worship of a male deity (New World Encyclopedia contributors 2012; cf Bachofen 1967:69-201).

Bachofen's theory, however, was founded on an impractical extrapolation of prevailing archaeological evidence in his time. His work still underpins modern theories of matriarchy in the feminist theology and feminist studies of matriarchy (New World Encyclopedia contributors 2012; cf Bachofen 1967:69-201). It has also been proposed that the genesis of male autocracy is to be found in societies that



indicated in the narratives (cf Jdg 14:2-5; 17:1-4) is removed by these assumptions.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, any assessment and understanding of women in Judges according to the traditional patriarchal paradigm would be inadequate. Since the theological importance of Judges cannot be derived only from the 'orthodox interpretive framework' (Stone (2009b), so too conventional ideas of patriarchy cannot be an accurate yardstick for the lives of the women in the pre-monarchic era.<sup>51</sup>

Subsequently, in the following segment I will discuss how a different understanding of Deborah's identity as wife and 'mother in Israel' possibly provided her with an equal status to her male counterparts that would have befitted a benevolent form of patriarchy in the pre-monarchic era. This may show how the titles 'mother' and 'wife' may in fact underline her authority and autonomy instead of denying the prophetess her independence and power in a patriarchal world, which does not fit the feminist description. The theocracy (that is, the rule and governance of the Israelite people by YHWH and their obedience to Him and His laws and ordinances) of the early Israelite community also played its part in allowing Deborah to rise to the heights of authority that she did.

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functioned along these matriarchal lines of authority. Subsequently, matriarchy has been labelled as a (required) pre-patriarchal evolutionary stage (Reeves Sanday 2008).

Goettner-Abendroth (2005) categorises power as 'usurped authority' and 'natural authority' to distinguish between matriarchal and patriarchal systems of control. The first type of power, in the form of domination and subjugation, is predominantly exercised in male-governed societies. In these nations, warfare and armies are important to enforce despotic rule. Ancient Near Eastern texts such as the Amarna letters are infused with accounts of power battles for economic and political domination in the Near East (Benzel et al 2010:23). The second type of power is that of 'natural authority' which is commonly practised by matriarchal societies. Those (matriarchal) cultures, in which commands are accepted without force, are marked by equalitarian and peaceful co-existence (Goettner-Abendroth 2005).

<sup>50</sup> Meyers (1988:24) comments that 'the wide range of attitudes' held by 'feminist interpretation of biblical patriarchy' are all negative. 'Mildly critical stances give way at times to strong condemnation' (Meyers 1988:24).

<sup>51</sup> Stone (2009b) remarks that the world of Judges is a complicated one in which people inexplicably act, at times, outside of the conventional theological perspectives. These theological perspectives are characterised by the 'cyclical pattern' of apostasy, repentance and renewal. It is this cycle, the violation of the covenant, that leads to the subsequent corruption of the Israelites (cf Ex 23:20-30; Jdg 2.1-3; cf 2.3.3; 4.3.1). Therefore, people's behaviour in Judges should be seen in conjunction with other factors such as variations or 'heterogeneous lives of the people of God' (Stone 2009b).

In my opinion, among the variations should be considered the impact of the foreign religions on the Israelite community and customs (cf Jdg 8:22; 11:30, 39; 17:1-4; 18). These foreign sacred rites we may find hard to grasp. I would suggest that in the Book of Judges, as Stone (2009b) declares, people's actions cannot be easily categorised as 'righteous or wicked' or when 'God's actions... are either unclear or troubling...' (cf Jdg 11:30, 39). Therefore, in my opinion, man's and God's reaction to this behaviour should be viewed within the framework of the syncretic religion practised by the Israelites.

b. Feminists view of patriarchy in the pre-monarchic period

Since ‘traditional authority’ of men over women is the primary and universal type of governance in ancient societies, some have made the deduction that the appearance of gender discrimination accompanied by corresponding arrangements of social hierarchies are directly related to the (adversarial) rule of the father or *paterfamilias* in early societies (Meagher 2011:441).<sup>52</sup> These observations by feminists have led to the development of patriarchy as a construct to explain the disparities in gender relations in early societies. Accordingly, gender (power-related) discrepancies were perceived to be the result of social organisation (patriarchy) and not the outcome of nature or biology.<sup>53</sup>

Henceforth, various definitions of patriarchy have been developed (Walby 1990:19; Meagher 2011:441-442).<sup>54</sup> Despite these variations in the concept of patriarchy, the patriarchal paradigm in general was expanded from the idea of the ‘rule of the father’ (in ancient societies) to denotations inclusive of a more wide-ranging system of governance by men (in modern times) (Meagher 2011:441). On the whole, feminists from various

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<sup>52</sup> Eller’s response to the riddle of male domination is to label pre-historic matriarchal populations ‘the myth of matriarchy prehistory’ (Eller 2000:7). It was a myth that was renewed by Johann Jakob Bachofen in 1861, who extracted his theory of the matriarchal origins of society from Classical Greek writings, and not a feminist concept (Eller 2000:7). In contrast, Tribble, followed by other feminist scholars, avoid this longstanding argument by attempting to surpass both matriarchy and patriarchy by focusing on the male and female qualities of YHWH and the equality in the relationship between the man and the woman in Genesis 1-3 and in Canticles (Tribble 1973:30-48).

The truth, according to Ortner (1996:24), is that anthropological and archaeological data do not reveal any evidence for ancient matriarchal societies. Matrilineal as can be seen in the Jewish tradition and society, rather than matriarchy, would have been a prevalent type of female authority in pre-history (Ortner 1996:24). However, I should add that the matrilineal principle was not part of the early Israelite society in the Bible, but one that was adopted in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD (Cohen 2001:5; cf Sorek 2002).

Ginn (2010) proposes that the earliest human communities were made up of matrilineal and matrilocal clans where men and women held separate but equivalently respected functions and privileges based on accepted rules in the society. Though the society in the Book of Judges was neither matrilocal nor matrilineal, Ginn’s idea of women’s authority equivalent to that of the male may grant insight into how the Israelite community functioned in the pre-monarchic period. This idea correlates with Meyers’ suggestion that men and women in the Iron Age I had separate tasks but equal authority (cf Jdg 14:2-5; 17:1-4).

<sup>53</sup> This is also a view apparently held by Weber (1947:63). In my opinion, Weber’s (1947:63) description of tradition as a means by which leaders can hold on to their authority and thus give them all the advantages in retaining their power could be the rationale for some who see patriarchy as the culprit for sex differentiations and other power imbalances in ancient and modern societies. See the definitions presented by Franzmann (2000:7-8).

<sup>54</sup> Feminist scholar Walby (1990:20) describes one such variant definition of patriarchy as including ‘a general element’ in which ‘men’s domination over each other is central to men’s domination over women’. Male domination over other males is also part of the definition Riss (2005) ascribes to patriarchy (cf Meagher 2011:442). Walby, however, views this as a mistake as there are few instances that validate this theory. The central focus of patriarchy, according to Walby, should be men’s organisational ability to exploit women’s labour in the workplace and in their households.

disciplines agree that patriarchy is a system of male power and control in which men dominate social organisations to the exclusion of female leadership in structures of power through methodical discrimination, marginalisation and the division of labour based on gender (Bowling & Martin 1985:308).<sup>55</sup> Johnson (2004:25-26, 29) defines ‘patriarchy’ as a (fixed) group of ideologies and codes in a society to promote masculinity and relegates women to the position of ‘other’. The consensus is that patriarchy is defined within the overt ‘male-dominated, male-identified’ and male-centeredness of its character (Johnson 2004:25-26, 29). As women are delegated to the category of ‘other’, they can be treated as men desire for they remain outside this definition of male rule and by extension dominant manhood (Johnson 2004:25-26, 29). Patriarchy, therefore, is commonly viewed as an (organisational) system of male dominance over women and the exploitation of female labour (Walby 1990:20; Riss 2005; cf Ebeling 2010:147; Meyers 2014:9). Feminists subsequently hold the belief that this understanding of patriarchy will lead to an improved understanding of women’s lived experiences and the distribution of power in their families, households and societies in antiquity and the modern era (Meagher 2011:442). Since female realities are normally experiences within the oppressive system of patriarchy, feminists usually cast women’s lived experiences under an extremely negative light.

Accordingly, Bellis (1994:76) defines the roles of heroines such as Ruth and Esther in the Old Testament to have been ‘subversive of patriarchy’. Elsewhere, Bellis (1994:176) describes Fuchs’ (1985:117-144) perception of the Biblical matriarchs as working to further the cause of male rule. Sarah is a woman who ‘advances the interest of male control in particular the man’s desire to control women’s sexuality and reproductive capacity’. Women’s lives in the Old Testament therefore elementarily depict either a struggle against patriarchy or compliance and preservation of male rule.

However, Johnson<sup>56</sup> (2004:25-32) notes that patriarchy as a social system is not oppressive. Rather, it is the individuals within the system that creates opportunities for domination and control (cf Jdg 11:34-39; 21:10-11; 20-22). Autocratic rule in this context

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<sup>55</sup> Bowling and Martin (1985:308-316) describe the discrimination of women in the scientific community, which they ascribe to the presence of patriarchy within the science community that is ‘manifested through male control of elite positions and various exclusionary devices’.

<sup>56</sup> Johnson, a male author, is a contributor to the feminist movement by advocating the eradication of gender inequality brought about by patriarchy.

cannot exist without the ‘oppressive personalities’ of the male who are ‘actively conspiring with one another to defend male privilege’ (cf Jdg 17-18; Johnson 2004:25-32). The violent incidents and crimes committed against the women in Chapter 19-21 in the Book of Judges lend credence to the oppressive and abusive constructs of patriarchy by feminists, contrary to the ideas about the benevolent form of patriarchy contained in this study.

I believe that feminist scholars present a picture of a utopian-like pre-historical epoch where men and women enjoyed the nurturing and guiding rule of their female elders free of any suffering. The enigma is how this ideal world later evolved into one of continued warfare under male domination. One may argue that this different world of war and male supremacy was the result of the disruption in women’s authority and the appropriation of it by men. According to the Book of Genesis, however, the man and woman were created with separate but equal natures. According to the Biblical narrative, their harmonious ‘society’ ceased when both the man and the women sinned against God (Gn 3).

Thus, disturbances in the relationship between men and women began, the nature of which was also dependent on fluctuations in socio-political and economic processes in the Biblical world. These would culminate in the atrocities committed against the women, as in Judges 19 and 21:12-13, 23. I believe that the women in the Book of Judges might have understood the equality and authority they had as determined in Genesis 1:28 and 2:18. The Bible might not have been written at the time of the pre-monarchic period; however, women and men were probably aware of God’s decrees concerning shared authority between them through oral tradition.

There is a distinction between male leadership and male domination (Ortlund 2005). The concept might be difficult to understand, but under benevolent male leadership, women are granted equal authority (Chennattu 1996). Genesis 2:18 does not include the woman’s inferiority or any hierarchy (Tkach 2004; cf Tribble 1973:35-37; Stelzer 2007). However, the people also knew that theirs was a fragile authority and that men and women were vulnerable to impairments in their relationship (cf Gn 3:16). In my opinion, there might be a hint of this awareness in Deborah’s (Jdg 4:9; cf Jdg 5:7) words when Barak demands her presence in his military campaign against the Canaanite general Sisera: ‘...the honor will not be yours for the Lord will hand Sisera over to a woman’.

In light of the above statements, in the following section the discussion will be

threefold and feature those elements that provided women with authority and status in the pre-monarchic community that are frequently disregarded by feminists and other scholars. Firstly, I will look at the covenant between YHWH and His people that allowed women a certain type of authority (derived from Genesis 1:28 and 2:18) which I believe is not recognized by feminists. It was an authority that allowed women associated status and significance in a world fraught by war and apostasy.

Secondly, I will also discuss hidden polemics in the narratives, often overlooked by feminists that depict the authors/editors of Judges criticism against the dominant cultural ideology of the pre-monarchic period. In my opinion, however, the dominant cultural ideology – patriarchy was not always abusive towards women. Thirdly, I will illustrate discussing Deborah as a model for the (*ezer-kenegdo*) authority (see 2.3.3.1; Footnote 57) that pre-monarchic period women could possess authority alongside their male counterparts, which is what YHWH desired for His people.

Finally, I will describe the theocratic social arrangement that may have led to a benevolent patriarchal structure and which allowed women's authority to exist alongside that of their male counterparts.

### **2.3.3 The covenant between YHWH and His people**

Male achievements and lives are prominently depicted in the Bible (in the Book of Judges, for example) which, according to Fletcher, were the aspirations of men and not of God (Fletcher 2006a). In the Old Testament, YHWH had made a covenant with the tribes under the leadership of Moses before they entered Canaan (Ex 6:7; Lv 26:12). He (YHWH) would be their King and they would be His people [theocracy] (Barrick 1999:220). Monotheism made the Israelite tribes unique among the many nations in the ancient Near East (Meyers 1978:92). They had developed a revolutionary new worldview in the period before the Monarchy (Meyers 1978:92).

The reconfirmation of the covenant at Sinai (Ex 19:1-8; Joshua 24:25) 'marked a new beginning of a new era in the history of God's people' and which 'by its revelation spiritual vassals were instructed in their duties' (Barrick 1999:220). In other words, YHWH reaffirmed His Kingship over His people with a special relationship (cf 4.3.1). The people would worship YHWH through the covenantal laws He had decreed within His theocratic

rule. The covenant would have a radical effect on the women in the community of the pre-monarchic period. Under YHWH's theocratic rule, women could possess a certain authority (what I call the *ezer-kenegdo* authority according to Genesis 2:18; see below 2.3.3.1; Footnote 57) and autonomy parallel to their male counterparts (cf Gn 1:28; 2:18).

### 2.3.3.1 *The ezer-kenegdo authority*

I believe the *ezer-kenegdo* authority of women (cf Gn 2:18) was a divine decree.<sup>57</sup> It was a declaration made by YHWH (Gn 1:28; 2:18) and always universally intended for all women and men. The view that patriarchy is Biblical and that it was a system of abuse and oppression of women which was supported in the Bible is a one-sided viewpoint based on preconceived ideas of patriarchy (Meyers 2013:182-187). Within the theocracy YHWH allowed community equality between men and women.

Both genders would be blessed if they worshipped YHWH only all and not any of the other foreign gods in Canaan. Both men and women would be held responsible for any infraction of the covenant (cf Jos 24:1-33). Israelite women and men chose their male and female leaders, while the majority worked towards nation building that is the energy or

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<sup>57</sup> Motivated by Genesis 2:18, I will call the equality in the relationship that existed in the male and female partnership the *ezer-kenegdo* model of male and female authority, which allowed women unsurpassed authority and influence, particularly in her household.

The Hebrew phrase for helper, suitably, is *ezer-kenegdo*. The word helper is translated from the Hebrew word: *ezer* – a masculine noun (Strong's Concordance 2014). The word is a blending of two roots: one, which means 'to save', and the other 'strength'. *Kenegdo* means a corresponding character or helper of the same nature. The text in Genesis 2:18 can be interpreted as 'I will make a power (or strength) corresponding (and equal) to man (Freedman 1983:56-58).

I believe that the *ezer-kenegdo* model would have particularly flourished in the period before, and with most its features still visible, in the 'interlocal' (see 2.4.1.1b) and paternal (see 2.4.1.1c) forms of male authority. The designation *ezer-kenegdo* (helper), in the original Hebrew meaning, confers upon the first woman – Eve – 'power' identical to that of the man – Adam (Sulik 2014). Through the *ezer-kenegdo* appellation, God declared the woman to have equal position and authority as the man. Women are like men, only in a different physical manifestation.

Evidence of the equality in the relationship between men and women in early Israel is also revealed in that when Adam and Eve married, they each received 'one of the letters of God's name' (Eisenberg 2004:46), and also in the feminine nouns attributed to some of God's names, such as in Ruwach (see Ruwach, 2014. From: <http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/Lexicon.cfm?strongs=H7307>).

The intrinsic equality in the *ezer-kenegdo* relationship by which the community also identified itself (cf Gn 1:28; 2:18; 17:15) would have been taught to both daughters and sons. It is my opinion that the pre-monarchic mother instructed her children that it was the custom in their community to uphold the same status and treatment for all members within the social, religious and economic spheres. I have mentioned before that social structures do not arise in a vacuum (see Footnote 41).

Consequently, I believe that the authority and autonomy of women such as Deborah, Jael, Achsah and the mothers of Samson and Micah, for example, were a legacy that they inherited from the generations of equally independent and powerful women (who held the *ezer-kenegdo* authority) that went before them.

leadership directives converted into matter or actions by assistants (see Footnote 41). They knew and understood that each member had a task to fulfil in their push towards self-determination in their homeland. I believe that the women, in their control of the household production and reproduction processes, were ideologically motivated to secure the survival of their households (cf Gn 17:15).

In the covenantal relationship with YHWH, the Israelites were a people belonging to God, their ultimate Father and Authority, who gave them the land as a promised inheritance (Gn 17:8). The land was therefore their God-ordained destiny. There was no place for an oppressive and cruel patriarchy (Meyers 2014:8-27) or perchance that society would collapse and vanish as so many of the ancient Near Eastern nations. The equality in the male-female relationship (the *ezer-kenegdo* authority) in the public sphere (Jdg 4-5) and in the household (Jdg 14:2-5) is what underpinned the pre-monarchic community. Indeed, it became an absolute necessity for women to acquire authority to contribute towards the social and economic needs that arose in their community and all that was required for their survival. The ‘proactive and dynamic’ matriarchs would have passed on these ‘traditions’ to their successors (Meyers 2009a).

Under YHWH’s rule, the Israelite women manifested this robust and industrious spirit in the fullest capacity. These women were probably the antecedents of the wife portrayed in Proverbs 31. Contained within the instructions of Proverbs 31 are the traces and proof of a bygone pre-monarchic age and a different manner of male rule in which female authority and power (the *ezer-kenegdo* authority) was the normal way of life for both men and women. However, the ordinary Israelite women’s lived experiences had to adapt radically to accommodate the transformations as the cycles of war and peace engulfed them (see 2.3). As mentioned before (see 2.3), these cycles resulted in changes in the structures of governance and rule in the Israelite community. Every time oppression and war took hold of the Israelite community, the Israelites were in a state of apostasy and wickedness (cf Jdg 4:1; 6:1; Jdg 20-21).

Times of warfare did not bode well for women. On the other hand, it is possible that as women had to step into the shoes of the absent men, opportunities for women’s authority became available. I believe that during times of warfare and civil strife, the Israelite male was unable to secure the protection and provide for the women (and men) in

his care as well as he did in more ‘normal’ or peaceful times. This also assisted in directing women towards opportunities for empowerment and made it possible for women such as Deborah, already well established and practicing the *ezer-kenegdo* authority to rise to further positions of prominence ‘among mostly male leaders and heroes’ (Exum 1985:85).

It appears that as the King of the Israelites (Ex 19:6), YHWH did not discriminate between woman and men when He passed on His authority and communicated with His people through the offices of judge and priest and the other offices of public responsibilities as seen in the Book of Judges. This religious ideology resulted in women’s authority and autonomy (the *ezer-kenegdo* authority) as expressed in Judges in the characters of Achsah (Jdg 1:11-15), Deborah and Jael (Jdg 4-5), the mothers of Samson and Micah (Jdg 13 and 14; 17:1- 4), and Delilah (Jdg 16).

The theological contexts of the covenant by which the people were elected by grace was a grace that was extended to men and women alike (Barrick 1999:221-222; cf Venema 2010:41). The blessings and YHWH's favour upon the people were conditional and contingent upon the obedience of both men and women (Venema 2010:48-49; Henebury 2017). Apparently, the authors/editors of the Book of Judges were aware of this and they appear to express their criticism, by means of hidden polemics in the texts, against the dominant cultural ideology that during certain times were harmful to women (see Van der Merwe and Coetzee (2009) and Le Roux (2015; 2016).

### *2.3.1.1 Hidden polemics in the Book of Judges*

The Book of Judges gives the impression that the narratives contain all the good and all the bad about women and men as they are observed and conceived to be by the writers or editors of the Book of Judges. However, it seems that much of the observations by the authors/editors of Judges are disguised in the form of hidden polemics in the text (see 2.3). Van der Merwe and Coetzee (2009 in Le Roux 2015; 2016) believes that important counter-culture rhetoric is delivered by the authors/editors of Judges in its narratives (see Van der Merwe & Coetzee 2009).

YHWH’s covenantal rule advocated equality, roles and status for women alongside their menfolk as we can determine from the narratives that feature women such as Achsah (Jdg 1:14-15), Deborah and Jael (Jdg 4-5); the mother of Samson (Jdg 13-14:2-5) and the



mother of Micah (Jdg 17:1-4) for example. Yet, the dominant cultural ideology (contrary to the covenant) held women as the non-ideal body type in contrast to the preferred ideal male body (see 1.1; 2.1; see Van der Merwe & Coetzee 2009:678). It is held that patriarchy as the dominant social and cultural ideology (see 1.1) in general tended to favour the ‘ideal (whole) male body’, for example. In the Book of Judges, Samson, for instance, is ‘favoured by God despite his disobedience’ (Van der Merwe & Coetzee 2009:679, 683; cf Le Roux 2015; 2016). However, God’s favour of Samson, was not conveyed on Samson because he was male but possibly because of the covenant (see 2.3.3, 2.3.3.1) and the fact that Samson was a child of promise (cf Jdg 13:3). Ultimately, Samson would lose God’s favour.

The lives of women (being the non-ideal [unwhole] body) were customarily overshadowed by the ideal male body within the (malevolent) patriarchal system (see Van der Merwe & Coetzee 2009:683). In my opinion, this state of affairs (the dominant cultural ideology) made the women in the pre-monarchic community vulnerable to oppression and abuse (cf Jdg 19-21). This situation was particularly true during times of social upheavals and religious turbulence in the community (see 2.3; cf Jdg 20-21). However, it appears that the (male) authors/editors of the Book of Judges were aware of the inequality this created for women and that it was a further violation of the covenant with YHWH. In the Book of Judges, there are polemics hidden in the text by the authors/editors to draw the attention of the readers to specific social injustices or problems in the community (see Van der Merwe & Coetzee 2009:677; Le Roux 2015:503-521; 2016:501-526).

Van der Merwe and Coetzee (2009:678-679) comment that the continuous creation of survival by ‘non-ideal female’ displaces ‘the dominant ideology of the whole (male) body throughout the book’ (insertion mine). Van der Merwe and Coetzee (2009:680) believe that the authors/editors of Judges, through the displacement of the dominant cultural ideology, were advocating ‘an alternate ideology which no longer regarded difference and different-functioning bodies as threatening’. In other words, women and men were granted equality by the authors/editors of Judges probably keeping in mind the covenant. To my mind when the covenantal rules were upheld by the people (see 2.3.3) and the *ezer-kenegdo* authority could be maintained (see 2.3.3.1) within YHWH’s kingship rule, heterarchical and benevolent patriarchal structures were provided with rich soil in which to flourish to the benefit of men and women in the pre-monarchic community. The

dismissal of these elements and the over-emphasis of the events in Judges 19-21 present a one-sided view of women's lives in the pre-monarchic times.

Apparently, in the pre-monarchic period of the Book of Judges some women acted outside the parameters of the dominant cultural ideology (or patriarchy; see 1.1). Evidently, these women took up 'unconventional roles' that gave them equivalent status to their male counterparts (cf Jdg 4-5). Deborah's roles as prophetess, inquisitor and judge, for example, differed 'to what is expected of her role as a woman and a wife' (Van der Merwe & Coetzee 2009:683). In addition, there are indications of women's authority and autonomy in various narratives related to the pre-monarchic period that are contrary to the paradigm of the downtrodden woman in early Israel (cf Jdg 1:14-15; 4-5; 14:1-5; 17:1-4).

The above-mentioned scenarios could not have been possible when strict and abusive patriarchal authority (as held by feminists, see 1.1; 1.1.1.1; 1.1.1.2; 1.1.2.3) was enforced in the daily lives of women.

In the following segment, I will look at the character of Deborah in the Book of Judges one of the non-ideal bodies that is (consistently) acting outside the conventional parameters of the dominant cultural ideology. Within the patriarchal system, people were expected to act within their approved societal and cultural functions. Consequently, women's lived experiences should have functioned strictly within their roles as wives and mothers. Yet, there are women such as Deborah (Jdg 4-5) apparently, who are occupying roles in the community in addition to that of being wives and mothers. Deborah embodies the spirit of the *ezer-kenegdo* authority discussed above (see 2.3.3.1) in her varied roles as leader of Israel, arbiter, warrior, wife and mother. It is my opinion that though the historical and archaeological records do not indicate it, it is possible that Deborah was not the exception but that more women might have occupied all of these positions in the community.

Nevertheless, it is particularly the last two roles (wife and mother) from which women derived their authority and status in the community. It is a recognized fact that motherhood in the pre-monarchic Israelite community granted women a certain status and concomitant authority. As mentioned above, this was an accepted and expected role that was appropriate to pre-monarchic societal norms. However, feminists do not recognize women's authority associated with motherhood as important compared to men who could

derive their authority from various roles in addition to or apart from fatherhood. Hence feminists do not place the same emphasis and value on it as in Biblical antiquity. Therefore, motherhood and associated authority is frequently dismissed by feminists as legitimate authority – a situation that in my opinion grants a partisan view of women's status and roles in the pre-monarchic period.

### 2.3.3.3 *Deborah: The wife of Lapidoth and a 'mother in Israel'*

In modern times women's titles as mothers and wives, apparently, no longer hold the same intense and encompassing significance as in Biblical times (see Footnote 60). Accordingly, the authority and status derived from women's roles as wives and mothers are frequently overlooked since these roles no longer have the same meaning in modern times.

In Judges 4 we meet the remarkable Deborah. Deborah, a woman, inquisitor, prophetess and 'wife of Lapidoth, (Ellicott 2016d; cf Barnes 1870b; Bullinger 1922c and Gill 2012c) who was herself judging Israel during that time (Jdg 4:4 [ISV]). Gill (2012c) comments that while Deborah's name was commonly given to women, it is not clear who Lapidoth was or 'what is meant by his name'.

Whereas many believe Lapidoth to be Deborah's husband, others interpret Lapidoth to mean the name of the place of her 'habitation' (Gill 2012c). Easton (1997d) remarks that since Lapidoth means 'torches', some understand 'the wife of Lapidoth' to mean 'woman of fiery spirit' under the belief that Lapidoth is not a proper name.<sup>58</sup> Deborah is the only female ruler in Israelite antiquity, excluding Athaliah (2 Ki 11:1-16).<sup>59</sup> She is the only female prophetess an inquisitor to whom the title of judge is assigned. In Judges 5:7, Deborah gives herself the title of a mother in Israel.

The Canaanite oppression of the Israelites was so severe (Jdg 4:1) that it interrupted life in the villages (Jdg 5:7). People abandoned their communities (Jdg 5:7). They probably fled to caves and strongholds in the mountains to escape Canaanite tyranny (cf Jdg 6:2).

It is in this environment that Deborah, already established in the elected offices of

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<sup>58</sup> There are different interpretations of this phrase; however, I hold the idea that Lapidoth is a proper name.

<sup>59</sup> Athaliah (2 Ki 8:26) is the only female monarch in the Old Testament said to have reigned in Israel. Her rule lasted for six years until she was killed in a rebellion led by the priest Jehoiada. For more information, see Brenner 2009.

prophet and arbiter (cf 4.3.7.2; 4.3.7.3; Mouser 2006:211; Cundall & Morris 2011:30), rises to even greater prominence. It is Deborah's descriptions as mother and wife – 'those patriarchal delimiters of a woman's identity' (Fewell & Gunn 1990:391) – that, according to Brenner (1993:11), deny her own identity and total independence within the patriarchal paradigm of the story in Judges 4-5. But wives and mothers in Judges, however much we may see them as ordinary women in modern times, were titles of high regard that spoke of a woman's status and authority in the community. When Deborah identified herself as a 'mother' in Israel (whether a biological mother or one by title), she was making an important statement of who she was before (and after) she took up military leadership of Israel. The terms 'mother' and 'father' were used for leaders (Glahn 2011). The young Levite priest in Judges 17:7 and 18 :3, for example, was given the honorific title of 'father' by Micah since he became the priest and leader of the Micah's house shrine (Jdg 17:10). The word 'mother' may have been used by Deborah in a metamorphic sense (Benson 1857a) to indicate that she was a leader and a deliverer and therefore not (only) a biological mother (Glahn 2011).

As a mother, Deborah is a woman, of certain power and authority in her household (cf 4.3.4.1; 4.3.5.1; 4.3.7.1-4.3.7.3; 5.5.3.1 b) who could easily extend her authority to the provision of care and protection that Israel needed. Deborah belonged to that part of womanhood, i.e. motherhood, women who as mothers were determining factors in the continuation of the Israelite community. Without women as wives and mothers, the Israelites would have had no future. Perhaps this is the reason why the mothers of Samson and Micah are unnamed. For in identifying them as mothers, their authority and role in the community are established. Their personal names, therefore, are rendered unnecessary.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> This is a challenging concept for western women. We identify ourselves by our personal names and often enough by our accomplishments outside the domestic sphere. The roles of women in the modern household as wives and mothers have become mundane and unimportant, secondary and oppressive. These, however, are the roles that undergird any given society at any given time in history, in the past and in the present.

In my personal encounters with certain Arab women, I became aware that they, adhering to tradition, would proudly identify themselves to be the mother of a son or sons (or daughters). This is an identity that is part of their self-understanding as women, the mothers of the nation. Their purpose and roles in life are understood and faithfully followed. According to them, their roles in their families complete them and are valued.

Nowadays, many Arab women have the opportunity to excel alongside their male counterparts at university and tertiary institutions although these educational institutes are gender segregated. Women may enter the job market and are given that choice by their fathers or male guardians. I am not claiming the absence of abuse and oppression of these women by the men in their patriarchal environment. What I am

Mowczko (2013:7-9) suggests that the nameless women in Judges are not ‘actually without an identity’. The way they were identified – that is wife, mother and daughter – was easily understood in the Biblical times, but not in the Western world (Mowczko 2013:7-9).

Naturally, the identity of a mother is tied to that of a wife in the dominant cultural ideology (patriarchal system). In keeping with the tradition of the early Rabbis, Judges 4:4 and 5:7 may be understood as Midrashim<sup>61</sup> of Genesis 1:28 and 2:18. In other words, Judges 4:4 and 5:7 are commentaries of Genesis 1:28 and 2:18 when God blesses both the man and the woman to populate and rule over the earth (Gn 1:28) and when He creates a helper (*ezer-kenegdo*, cf Footnote 57) for the man (Gn 2:18). The reader of the Bible will find in Judges 4:4 and 5:7 a clarification and an illustration of how the woman will rule over the earth – as a wife and as a mother in a partnership of equality with her husband. According to the Midrash, as a wife she has equal decision-making authority over the earth, and as a mother she determines the future of the earth. The Jewish technique of hermeneutics follows four levels of interpretation: the literal (*peshat*), allegorical (*remez*), practical (*derash*) and the mystical (*sod*) meanings (Elwart 2016).

Accordingly, passages such as Judges 5:7 and other texts in which the titles ‘wife’

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saying is that we should not deny them the authority that they do possess according to our western standards and ideas of what constitute women’s authority simply because we have come to devalue our status as mothers, wives and even daughters.

Arab women acting upon this freedom of choice elect to marry and become mothers or not. That being said, there are those who are still married against their own wishes. However, women’s important role in the workforce is starting to be recognised and encouraged through establishing female vocational institutions, for example. According to Saudi Vision 2030 (an initiative by Saudi King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to develop the country away from over-dependence on oil revenues) women’s rights and their equality are some of the most important issues that are on the forefront of change in the country.

Many Arab women would be horrified to do without the perception of themselves as mothers and wives. (This perception, however, might slowly be changing among the younger female generation as they are exposed to the Western world through the internet). Western women cannot stand in judgment of this and attempt to convince them that they can do better as women than *just* being wives and mothers.

I presume that a similar view (to the Arab mothers, mentioned above) may have been held by the women in the Book of Judges; by the mothers of Samson and Micah, for example. They were comfortable with their own identities as wives and mothers and concomitant authority in the Book of Judges.

How is it then that Western women can impose their own ideas of what constitute authority in their culture on another and then speak on behalf of women who are not present to voice their own opinions? It is disturbing that a group of women may think of a second group as oppressed when the second group is living fulfilled lives and have certain authority that may be completely misunderstood or not seen as ‘real’ authority by the first group. This (first) group will then attempt to persuade everyone that the second group needs to be liberated when this is not the case.

<sup>61</sup> A Midrash (pl = midrashim) is an early Jewish commentary or interpretation on a Biblical text. It may elucidate and expand a point of law or develop or illustrate a moral principle (Midrash 2016, Dictionary.com. From: [www. http://www.dictionary.com/browse/midrash](http://www.dictionary.com/browse/midrash)).

and ‘mother’ occur should be interpreted on all these levels instead of perhaps only the literal and practical levels. It is perhaps the mystical understanding of being a wife and a mother, one that is lost to the Western mind but which the women in the Book of Judges fully understood and lived by, that gave them an authority concomitant to that of their menfolk.<sup>62</sup> Under YHWH’s rule (theocracy) both men and women during the pre-monarchic period could attain equal status as demonstrated by Deborah, for example. Accordingly, in the character of Deborah we are provided with evidence for male rule in the pre-monarchic period that was benevolent and allowed women to gain authority and concomitant status.

I believe therefore that the atrocious acts committed against women (cf Jdg 19-21) were not the norm in the pre-monarchic age but rather instance that can be ascribed to the breakdown of YHWH’s covenantal laws in the Israelite community. These incidents of crimes against feminine lives are generally held as evidence by feminists of a male dominated society in which women were perennially abused and oppressed. However, in the following section, I will contest feminists’ ideas of patriarchy since in the characters of Deborah and Jael (Jdg 4-5), Achsah (Jdg 1:14-15), the mother of Samson (Jdg 13; 14:2-5), the mother of Micah (Jdg 17:1-4) evidence is provided for a social organisational structure (YHWH’s covenantal rule which allowed benevolent patriarchal structures to exist) in which women showed a great deal of independence, authority and decision-making power.

### **2.3.4 Theocratic social arrangement: benevolent patriarchy**

The episodes in Judges 19-20, to my mind, however, are not typical of Israelite society and are overshadowed by an atmosphere of benevolent patrimonialism (Jdg 1:14-15; 4-5; 14:1-5; 17:1-4) and equal female authority (Jdg 4-5; 13; 14:2-5; 17:1-4) in the theocratic social organisation of the pre-monarchic community. Kostenberger and Kostenberger (2014) question the validity of feminist analysis of the Bible as inherently biased and patriarchal

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<sup>62</sup> I propose that the mystical meanings of wife and mother (alongside that of husband and father) have to do with some divine aspects of God. This includes the characteristics of nurturing, caring, protection and provision, but also has to do with the unity of the Godhead. In the same way that the Holy Trinity remains a mystery, so too the deeper spiritual meanings of wife and mother (and husband and father). Although the Hebrew Bible does not convey a well-defined image of the Godhead, it does contain indications of the plurality of God (Gn 1:1-2; Ex 3:13-14; Nu 6:22-27; Dt 6:4). According to Damato [sa], the plurality of God was understood by the Israelites. In women’s roles as wives and mothers, this plurality of the Godhead might be represented.

and state that ‘recent scholarship from both feminist and non-feminist circles suggest otherwise’ (see Meyers 1988; 2006:245-254; 2014:8-27). In their book, *God’s Design for Man and Woman*, Kostenberger and Kostenberger (2014) emphasise ‘a pervasive pattern of sacrificial, loving and caring male leadership...’ Within the covenant between YHWH and the people (cf 2.3.3; 4.3.1), malevolent patriarchy could not be upheld (cf 1.1; 1.1.1; 1.1.1.1-1.1.1.3 a, b, c) since YHWH had elected the people to maintain His values and principles within their special relationship.

Contrary to this special relationship and the covenantal laws attached to it, the militant, aggressive totalitarian ruler (as depicted by the elders in Judges 21, for example) could not overshadow the redeeming qualities of the *paterfamilias* as guardian and benefactor (representing YHWH) who supplies a society with mechanisms for government, law and stability (the pre-monarchic Israelites also experienced peaceful times). In Joshua 24:24-25, the people had reconfirmed their covenant with YHWH to be His ‘chosen people’ and to worship Him alone. As mentioned before (see 2.3), while the people faithfully followed YHWH, women in all probability enjoyed the type of authority that was concomitant to their roles and status in their household and the wider community.

However, since the pre-monarchic period was such a turbulent time (see 2.3), we can speculate that women’s roles and status were either valued or less esteemed according to the cycles of war and peace that existed in that period.

In light of the aforementioned statement, it is therefore evident that a duality in the form of organisational rule in the Book of Judges emerges (cf Jdg 1:14-15; Jdg 21:10-11, 20-22). From this dichotomy, we may deduce differing forms of male rule (Walby 1990:2; Oliver 1990:169-171), each with its own defining qualities (see 2.4.1.1 a, b, c), some of which were beneficial to women and which I place in the category of benevolent patriarchy.

In addition, there are women in the Book of Judges who apparently validate the previous statement. Women such as Achsah (Jdg 1:11-15), Deborah and Jael (Judges 4-5), the mothers of Samson and Micah (Jdg 13-14; 17:1-4), the unnamed women of Thebez (Jdg 9:53), Delilah (Jdg 16) and the concubine of the Levite (Jdg 19:2) whose lives and actions reflect a form of male rule that is more conducive to women.<sup>63</sup> These women, it

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<sup>63</sup> I believe that in the case of Delilah, she seems to be acting solely in her own interests, outside the boundaries of the dominant cultural ideology that focuses on the group and not the individual. (Jdg 16). She is independent and owns her own home and therefore might be a woman of substance and connected to the

appears, are participating within a form of social governance that is atypical to conventional concepts of patriarchy. Accordingly, Meyers (2014:9) comments that the narratives in which these women appear add to the problematic issue of defining patriarchy in the Biblical contexts.<sup>64</sup> However, as mentioned above and taking the people's covenantal relationship under YHWH's kingship into consider, I believe that a benevolent patriarchy existed that sought to benefit all the members of the community. In the following segment, I will discuss the issue of the redefinition of patriarchy.

## 2.4 REDEFINING PATRIARCHY

### 2.4.1 Introduction

One possible interpretation of patriarchy in the Book of Judges is that of the strict, dominating father ruling his household with an iron fist (cf Jdg 11:34-39). As the dominant and autocratic figure in the household, the authority of the *paterfamilias* left little room for gender equality. However, it does appear that the behaviour of women in the period of the Judges defies conventional ideas about male rule in early Canaan and therefore the term patriarchy itself needs to be redefined. YHWH's rule over the Israelite communities and His (equal) expectations for both men and women might need to be considered when redefining patriarchy in the pre-monarchic era.

Living in the oppressive and restraining shadow of the *paterfamilias*, the equal participation of women in the economic productivity of the household and the wider community would not have been feasible (cf women's cultic and economic labour in Chapters Four and Five). From the narratives in the Book of Judges it is evident that women's participation in the productive capacity of the household and the community included freedom of movement (cf Jdg 13:9; cf Chapter Four and Five) and decision-making regarding marriage (Jdg 14:2-3). Included also were property owned by women and the economic future and viability of their households (cf Jdg 1:14-15), as well as autonomy to manage the women's area of the household or the *bêt ēm* (Jdg 14:12; 16:13;

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Philistine upper class. It seems that fear of the Philistine rulers and intimidation by them played a role in her betrayal of Samson. Perhaps she heard what happened to Samson's first wife, the cruel murder of the woman by fire (Jdg 15:6). The concubine of the Levite's action of departing from her husband for her father's house does not appear to be the behaviour of a woman who is under the thumb of male rule.

<sup>64</sup> It seems their behaviour fits well into the two possible variant forms of patriarchy presented (see 2.4.1.1).



cf 5.1.1; 5.3.1.3) or to work in fields independent of their husbands or male family members (Jdg 13:9; cf 3.1.3.4 b).

Any type of despotic rule by the *paterfamilias* (or *bêt āb*) would have been counterproductive to the economic survival of the household. The survival of the pre-monarchic subsistence household in the harsh landscape of the Hill Country depended on the contributions in productive quantities by both men and women. These contributions, were essential to the needs of the household and excluded the domination of one gender over the other.

Ebeling challenges mainstream perceptions of the oppressed Israelite women who were considered items of (male) property. Meyers (2014:8) remarks that patriarchy is a word that conveys ‘the social science construct of male dominance’. It is, however, not used as a term to describe the ancient family and society in the Hebrew Bible (Meyers 2014:8). Furthermore, Schloen (2001:44) determines that early patriarchy cannot be delineated (objectively) in terms of modern ‘evolutionary or ecosystemic’ theories,<sup>65</sup> but should rather be understood subjectively by those who experienced it in early times. Ackerman (2003:14) also notes that we lack ‘a direct [female] witness’ to women’s lived

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<sup>65</sup> From the ideas above, we may deduce that the roots of patriarchy are to be found in early territorialism and that competition for available resources added to male aggression. In the early hunter-gatherer populations, women were more self-sufficient and mobile. However, women were also vulnerable to male aggression but could be sheltered by the members of their clan (Ginn 2010). Some hold that the subjugation of women had already begun in these early groups of people.

Escoriza-Mateu (2008:55-57) reports on Levantine Rock Art (also called Rock Art of the Mediterranean Basin of the Iberian Peninsula) – painted symbolic pictures that form arrangements and scenes of different themes (Escoriza-Mateu 2008). According to Escoriza-Mateu (2008), these painted panels show the exploitation of women in the unequal allocation of labour, with women performing more tasks than men without adequate material compensation and males benefitting more.

Women in the earliest ages had more work assignments. Representations of mainly hunting scenes make these (hunting) tasks appear more important than the multitude of tasks by women not painted. The exaggerated importance of hunting by males in these rock paintings as well as not rewarding women for their tasks in terms of material recompense exhibit a patriarchal ideology by hunter-gatherers in the form of ‘masculine domination and material control over women’ (Escoriza-Mateu 2008:55-57).

Thus, we may find the beginnings of detrimental gender ideologies. However, do these ancient rock images truly provide us with evidence of early male oppression, and do we indeed find a context for certain gender ideologies that may have been transmitted throughout the generations and appear in the pre-monarchic period? Stearns et al (2011:22) note that rock art provides researchers with the primary source of information regarding gender interactions, the station of men and women and the relations between them.

Evidently, it is the traditional interpretive framework of patriarchy that powerfully influences the understanding of the social organisation in the Stone Age (Stearns et al 2011:22). However, we cannot establish the gender of the artist who painted the images, the motivation and the actual understanding of these images in his or her cultural context. Since we lack alternative interpretations for reading these rock images, the traditional patriarchal model will hold, whether it is accurate or not.

reality in the Bible (insertion mine). From these thoughts, we may gather that it would be inaccurate to apply, with certitude, theories of primarily oppressive patriarchy as a social organisation in the pre-monarchic era.

Abusive patriarchy simply does not define women's lives for all the reasons mentioned previously as well as the activities and daily experiences of women mentioned in Chapters Four and Five that were afforded to them during YHWH's rule (2.3.3; 4.3.1) and the heterarchical organisation (see 2.2.2.1; 3.1.3.2 c; 5.1.1; 5.3.2; 6.3.3.1b) of their community and households. The most outstanding reason is that a sense of freedom of lifestyle and choices surrounded the men and women in the pre-monarchic era (cf Jdg 17:6; 21:25). The behaviour and personalities of the women in the Book of Judges confirm that the patriarchal parameters associated with those times were surpassed (cf women's religious and economic activities in Chapters Four and Five).

I suggest that a system of benevolent male rule within the YHWH's rule was entrenched in the everyday experiences of ordinary women and men in the early Israelite society, particularly during times of peace. When considering the totality of patriarchal functions, cultural references and variations in form mentioned above prior to the Iron Age II, a certain social structure emerges. It is one in which women participated equally and it is one in which they were afforded their authority and autonomy during YHWH's covenantal rule.

#### *2.4.1.1 Varying levels of male rule*

In view of the above (2.4.1), I believe that Meyers correctly identifies modern definitions of patriarchy to be misrepresentative of the actual power structures at play in the pre-monarchic period.<sup>66</sup> Lesko (1987:41-78) concurs that patriarchy often becomes amorphous

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<sup>66</sup> Analytic studies of ancient patriarchy have also neglected to consider the varying levels of male rule that existed in history (Walby 1990:2; Oliver 1990:169-171; cf Meyers 2014:8-27) that do not fit into the conventional interpretive framework of patriarchy (see 1.1). Within these variant forms of male authority, women were undeniably more empowered than previously documented and acknowledged by ancient writers. Women's authority and achievements were often ignored and downplayed by contemporary academics (Meyers 2002b:14-44; cf Nelson 2004:16, 29, 94, 120; cf Ackerman 2003:173-184; Spencer-Wood 2007:14, 234, 240). This is a situation that, in the words of Renee Dreyfuss, ... 'had to do with who the archaeologists were... gentlemen scholars of a certain generation' (Wilson 2006).

Wilson quotes Renee Dreyfuss, curator of 'Ancient Art and Interpretation' at the Fine Arts Museums at San Francisco. This is said in reference to William C. Hayes, former curator of Egyptian art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, who portrays Hatshepsut as a 'detested stepmother and vilest type of usurper' (Wilson 2006). Feminist scholars, unwittingly perhaps, are also denying women's authority by overlooking

with unclear demarcations in the history of the Israelites. According to Meyers (2014:26-27), women's lived experiences and authority need to be re-evaluated within the different levels of male domination that occur in the Bible.<sup>67</sup> Patriarchy after all is not an 'immutable feature in all societies'. At present, there is a demand for a more suitable patriarchal model to understand the life and intricacies of the feminine reality in ancient Israel before Iron Age II (Meyers 2014:26-27). Such a model, I believe, would also assist in constructing the history of the women in the pre-monarchic period.

#### a. Variations in male rule

In light of the above, it becomes hard to define the type of patriarchy in pre-monarchic age, for example. According to Oliver (1990:169), there is an evolution from what it in my opinion is beneficial paternal authority to absolute and oppressive patriarchal rule in Judges. I therefore believe that there is a transformation from benign paternal rule in the household and community of the pre-monarchic period to oppressive patriarchy in the monarchic period due to the people's apostasy from the covenant (see 2.3.3; 2.4.1), periods of war (see 2.3 for example) and concomitant moral depravity of the people. I propose that

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women's household authority as 'real' power equal to that of the male. Sorek (2010) remarks that men dominated ancient society, but it would have been the private and unseen influence of women that made society matrilineal.

From this idea, we may understand why women's authority in the Book of Judges is not evident, for the invisible influence of women would have been in their equally invisible households. Since ancient document such as the Bible focused primarily on men's activities in the public realm, for instance their leadership and militant activities in the Book of Judges, women's authority in the pre-monarchic household remained unrecorded.

<sup>67</sup>Nowadays, in certain Christian circles, there is a trend that advocates the modern father should take on power as the overseeing authority responsible for the well-being of the family, both physically and spiritually, as this is the patriarchy that was practised in Biblical times (see 6.3.2 e; 6.3.3.1; 6.3.4.3). Thus, according to Wilson and other likeminded men, Biblical patriarchy was not an 'evil' social system but one that should be admired and imitated by men today (see 6.3.2 e; 6.3.3.1; 6.3.4.3; Wilson 1999).

But as with any other type of power, patriarchy is open to abuse and that women did suffer under this system at times is evident in the Bible. Today, passages like Numbers 30 can be misinterpreted and used against women (Orlowski 2013). Conversely, women in the Bible did not always suffer unjustly under male rule and often reached the pinnacle of their power within it. Idealising patriarchy detracts from the idea of equality that is inherent in the first chapter of Genesis (Gn 1:28).

there were two phases of benevolent male rule, i.e. an ‘interlocal’ (see 1.5)<sup>68</sup> phase and ‘paternal authority’ that preceded ‘total’ patriarchy in the Bible.<sup>69</sup>

b. Benevolent patriarchy: An ‘interlocal’ form of patriarchy

In this variation, men were naturally in authority, but it was an authority that allowed women to hold power that could and did equal male authority (cf Gn 16:1-2; 27:8, 43;<sup>70</sup> Ex 15:20; Nm 12:2 [in which Miriam had equal leadership with her brothers]; Jdg 4; 4-5; 14:2-5; 17:1-4). I suggest that an ‘interlocal’ form of benevolent male rule may be apparent in the Book of Judges in the characters of Deborah (Jdg 4-5) and the mothers of Samson and Micah (cf Jdg 14:2-5; 17:1-4).<sup>71</sup> Men (Gn 16:3; Jdg 4-5) openly acknowledged female power and authority in keeping with YHWH’s ideal for equality between the gender groups.<sup>72</sup> In the ‘interlocal’ phase, women participated in military campaigns (cf 4.3.7.1;

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<sup>68</sup> I believe that the ‘interlocal’ form of male rule retained many of the characteristics of the age preceding it in which women and men were more or less equal in authority and autonomy as they upheld YHWH’s values and principles (cf Gn 1:28; 2:18). However, in this phase more men gained leadership roles in the wider community, outnumbering that of women.

<sup>69</sup> I believe there was a devolution of women’s autonomy and authority that eventually gave way to absolute patriarchy. Women experienced a steady erosion in their status after the two stages, i.e. the ‘interlocal’ phase and paternal authority, which eventually led to absolute patriarchy. Women’s subjugation was to the extent that at the time of the first century AD, a Mishnah (m Qidd. 1:1) would refer to women as being none other than slaves who could be obtained ‘through money, writ or intercourse’ (Gehring 2013:184).

I propose that the first community as indicated in Genesis 1 was organised in a social structure that might have been based on Genesis 1:28 and 2:18. In this stage, there probably was full equality between men and women. Thereafter, there was possibly an ‘interlocal’ social structure in which women still held equal authority and autonomy with men, but men became more prominent as leaders in the community. This ‘interlocal’ stage and the next, paternal authority, overlap.

They are both benevolent forms of male rule under YHWH’s covenantal rule. Finally, these beneficial forms of patriarchy both gave way to absolute male authority when the Israelite tribes wanted a human king instead of YHWH’s divine Kingship.

<sup>70</sup> Frymer-Kensky (2002:19) describes Rebecca as deceptive and sly because she lacked power and had to ‘negotiate her way through patriarchy’. I am of the opinion, however, that Rebecca’s operations are in fact signs of her status in the household and concomitant loyalty of her assistants since her plans possible required the assistance of others, possibly servants or her maids. Their compliance validates her authority. Jacob had to have known what Rebecca was planning. In the intimacy of a household, most secrets cannot be kept. I think that because of the birth-right law, Jacob was unable to break with the tradition himself. He left it up to his wife to find a way out of their predicament.

<sup>71</sup> The Genesis accounts of the matriarchs in the Hebrew Bible describe women who had authority and who did not hesitate to exercise their authority (Fletcher 1997). In Genesis, God blesses both Abraham and Sarah, signifying the equality of partnership that existed in their relationship. In Judges 14:1-3, Samson approaches both his parents for their assistance in gaining a woman’s hand in marriage, which speaks of the parents’ mutually shared authority. In Judges 1:14-15, autonomous Achsah openly approaches and requests additional land from her father.

<sup>72</sup> In Judges 17:1-5, Micah, fearful of his wealthy mother’s wrath, confesses to the crime of stealing from her. Delilah is an independent woman of substance (Jdg 16). Though ancient society placed great emphasis on the influence women could achieve through motherhood, this was not the only quality through which women

Yee 1993:111). They could command an army and they made judgements pertaining to military actions (Jdg 4:9, 14; 21; cf Jdg 9:53). Women could pass legal judgements and enforce judicial laws (Jdg 4:4-5). A woman could acquire property and participate in religious activities (Jdg 1:14-15; cf Jdg 17:1-5). She could decide her fate (Jdg 11:29-40), and according to Genesis 24:5, she could accept or refuse an offer of marriage, terminate a marriage (Jdg 19:1-2), or with her husband consent to a child's choice of marriage partner (Jdg 14:1-5). Consistent with the roles occupied by Deborah, women could be judges (Jdg 4:5), prophets (Jdg 4:4) and landowners (Jdg 1:14-15) in addition to fulfilling the roles of mothers (Jdg 5:7), receivers of divine messages (Jdg 13) and wives (Jdg 4:4). Women acted independently of their husbands; men accepted their decisions and they were more mobile than after the pre-monarchic age.<sup>73</sup> Meyers (1978:91-103) believes that a shift in demographics occurred towards the end of the Bronze Age in the great socio-political crises that took place in the ancient Near East.<sup>74</sup> This, in turn, created an increase in female authority in the pre-monarchic age (Meyers 1978:91-103) and promoted the effect of the

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could acquire status and authority. Deborah, for example, gained authority by being a judge and a prophet (Jdg 4-5). Although not on the same level as motherhood, there were other (economic and social) avenues for the ordinary woman to explore, such as weaving, cooking and certain religious functions.

Some women may have been medical healers possessing medicinal knowledge of plants, roots and other vegetation. In the isolation of the farms, it is possible that these women were called to farmsteads and villages where they practised rational therapy that included medical advice in the Old Testament and perhaps some of the Canaanite magical-religious therapy.

Rational therapy involved the treatment of diseases devoid of any magical or magical-religious influences. It would have been based on 'acute clinical observation and the development of sound empirical practices' (Steuer & Saunders 1959:2). However, rational therapy would have been used more to treat external health problems since it would have been easier to observe and understand their causes than internal medical problems since these would be invisible (Steuer & Saunders 1959:2; cf 4.6.4.3).

Nevertheless, it would be by means *inter alia* the occupation of the above-mentioned tasks that women could attain authority and standing in the community apart from or in association with their status as mothers and wives (the industrious woman in Proverbs 31, for example). The daughters of Ibzan (Jdg 12:9), like Achsah, probably took sizeable dowries into their marriages, which would possibly have given them more authority than women who married with fewer material possessions as their bride price (cf Jdg 1:14-15).

<sup>73</sup> According to Butt (2011), Deborah is a prime example of a woman who is a leader and equal to men in the broader Israelite society.

<sup>74</sup> Towards the end of the Bronze Age (13<sup>th</sup> century BC), the great empires in the Near East and the Aegean abruptly disintegrated. Trade and cities disappeared swiftly, and large-scale migration of populations occurred (Stiebing 2001:16-26). A period of 'decreased illiteracy, population and technology' followed, creating a power gap that enabled the Israelites to appear on the political scene of the ancient Near East (Wiener 2013; Schwartz [sa]:2-5).

‘interlocal’ phase.<sup>75</sup> I believe that in this phase, gender equality (see Chapter Three) was embedded in the monotheistic religion; in the covenantal lives of the proto-Israelites.<sup>76</sup>

### c. Paternal authority as a form of benevolent patriarchy

A second form of benevolent male rule would be paternal authority (Oliver 1990:169). In the household of her father or her husband, a woman could under male leadership enjoy safe shelter and daily provisions (Benner 2005:253) while maintaining her sense of self and her independence. However, in the pre-monarchic period, female activities were mostly restricted to the domestic sphere (Meyers 1978:91-103) for various reasons. One reason might have been to protect women from the violence in their dangerous society (cf Jdg 19). The other overwhelming motivation was that women’s productive and reproductive activities mainly occurred within her household. The benevolence of the *paterfamilias* would have created an equal environment that allowed women to enjoy all manners of benefits (Schloen 2001). It would also have allowed the existence of maternal authority. A woman could thus become the female equivalent of the *paterfamilias* – the *materfamilias*<sup>77</sup> – of the family and as such assume leadership positions according to YHWH’s theocratic rule.

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<sup>75</sup> Women’s authority and autonomy would be executed where women performed their various roles: in their households, on their farms and in the market places which were the foci of Iron Age I economy and commerce (Meyers 1997a:1-47; 1998:251-262; 2006:245-254; Ackerman 2003:173-184). Women’s authority might also have been a symbol of the ethos of the *ezer-kenegdo* relationship (cf Gn 2:18) that the Israelite community retained from their earliest beginnings (see 2.3.3.1; Footnote 57).

<sup>76</sup> The belief of the universal embracement of patriarchy as a societal device of power and authority that is antagonistic towards women within the social, economic, legal and political systems of diverse nations in (ancient and) modern times (Light 2005:453-456; Meagher 2011:441) is subject to serious questioning when pre-monarchic Israel and its social structures are considered (Meyers 2014:8-27). Lerner (1986:178) believes the Hebrew society ‘hardened the emphases of male cultic leadership and the tenancy towards misogyny’ because of the ‘ideological struggle of the Hebrew tribes against the worship of Canaanite deities and especially the persistence of a cult of the fertility goddess Asherah’.

<sup>77</sup> This, according to the feminist perspective of Exum, denotes two types of feminine power. The mother is both the ordinary and woman of consequence like Sarah and Rebecca, etcetera, from whom come the affirmation that a nation will continue to exist. A subsequent type of power a woman may have protects, liberates and provides (Exum 1985:85). These are additional roles, I believe, that are contained within the *ezer-kenegdo* authority of women in Judges (see 2.3.3.1; Footnote 57; see Jdg 4:4; 5:7; 14:2-5; 17:1-4). Deborah, in addition to her power as ruler of Israel, wants her authority as mother to be recognised as well in Judges 5:7.

This identification was important to women. With the title ‘mother’ comes an acknowledgment of the ordinary women’s status as mothers and their significance in the Israelite community. What greater power can any woman have? It can be imagined that it would not have been an easy task for the women to relinquish authority back to their men, particularly when the amount of women’s authority that was held back from

#### d. Patriarchal authority

Paternal authority conceded to a third system namely patriarchal authority (Oliver 1990:169). This is the rigid structure we encounter during the monarchy in the Iron Age II. Its roots, however, lie in earlier times (see below).<sup>78</sup> Patriarchy in early Israel developed

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them accumulated as time passed.

Birthing children was also a marker of a woman's significance, position and authority in her household and her community (Darr 1994:98). Deborah, in Judges 5:7 for example, described herself by the title of 'mother in Israel'. Consequently, women had the authority that was intimately defined by their status as mothers. Motherhood was closely associated with what was proper and right in the community, and hence it was vital for women to conform with the dominant cultural ideology and thus to be favoured by YHWH Himself. In the dominant cultural ideology, a barren woman, therefore, was the non-ideal body type that lacked the authority of a fertile woman with many children (cf 5.3.3).

<sup>78</sup> Natufian (ca 13000-8000 BC) practices of rigorous wild grain collecting and domestication of animals denotes the first farming settlements in the Levant (Bar-Yosef 1998:169; cf Stearns et al 2011:18-19, 22). Environmental and climatic changes allowed for stable and abundant sources of nourishment that led to people permanently settling down in one area (Stearns et al 2011:4-8). This revolutionary socio-economic shift occasioned the Natufian society onwards to become 'the threshold for this major evolutionary change' (Bar Yosef 1998:159).

The unearthing of food and grains and domesticated sheep and goats at Çatal Hüyük (Lerner 1986:32) illustrates the inception of farming and the domestication of animals in the Neolithic Age. A shift from nomadic to a sedentary life-style occurred. The development of agriculture in Mesopotamia enabled nomadic peoples to arrange themselves in increasing numbers in the first urban centres (Gabriel & Metz 1992). These new cities required an alternate style of governing and authority to ensure their survival. Hierarchical formations of novel class and governing structures within these cities arose (Gabriel & Metz 1992).

Dow, Olewiler and Reed (2005:1) note that the shift to agriculture was 'the most consequential case of rational economic choice in human history'. Furthermore, they believe that the transition to agriculture was crucial for the development of 'cities, states and writing... specialized crafts, inequality, hierarchy and organized warfare' (Dow, Olewiler & Reed 2005:1). Nascent male aggression and exploitation of women in the earlier societies reached a pinnacle as the transition from hunter-gathering culture to agriculture and concomitant changes shifted into full swing.

Bar-Yosef and Price (2011:167) relate that the origins of food generation lie in the ability of some people to produce excess and to convert this surplus into more valued objects. Thus, agriculture led to food surpluses which some people could use to gain access to sources that would lead to their personal enrichment. Situations therefore developed in which social inequalities occurred. Accordingly, erstwhile egalitarian societies were transformed into class-stratified social structures.

Bar-Yosef and Price (2011:167) note that the evidence for these social inequalities have been found in the ancient Near East. Because of their agricultural practices such as improved storage methods, the Natufian people had access to surplus food. Jewellery, burial sites and house arrangements show evidence of stratification in the Natufian culture in central Russia (Stearns et al 2011:16). With the development of stored food resources came the idea of private property and accordingly elite classes that included priesthoods (Ginn 2010).

In an ironic twist, Stearns et al (2011:6) observe that early agriculture might have started with women as they were the gatherers of food. 'Women as gatherers ... became aware of the possibility of deliberately planting seeds and harvesting grains'. In this burgeoning agricultural stage, the seeds of patriarchy and the mistreatment of women are sown. Ginn (2010) describes the change that was beginning to occur in the economic circumstance of a family or the community (cf Stearns et al 2011:6).

Surplus food led to higher birth rates as more labour was needed. Permanent settlement led to men instead of women controlling food resources. Previously women had free and independent access to food gathering. The transition to agriculture meant limited mobility for women and increased dependence on men.

into a fixed entity of control and subjugation of women upon the achievement of a centralised authority (Niditch 2001:176-191). During the monarchic period women were permanently restricted to their households (Meyers 1978:91-103). They lost their authority when the household economic, social, religious and political activities were taken away from the households and placed under the control of a centralised government and in urban centres (Bird 1999:3-20; cf Bird 1974:41-88).<sup>79</sup> Women's skills and authority were no longer needed and crucial for the survival of the Israelites.

One can envisage the prophet Jeremiah's shock and surprise when he predicted that a woman would protect a man (Jr 31:22). In Iron Age II, when women lacked the authority they had in previous eras, the prophecy would have been an incredulous one. We may gather that male rule is not unchangeable. Social, political, economic and religious restructuring led one form of male rule to be transformed into the next. Oliver (1990:169) comments that since patriarchy is variable in nature, certain feminists' strategies would be able to eradicate various patriarchal practices within specific historic settings. One such plan is the celebration of the feminine body and its history. Another is the perception of the feminine body as an autonomous entity which differs from male history and the patriarchal perception of a woman's body and her history (Oliver 1990:169). Block (1999a:54) presents a less convoluted solution to correct the imbalances between men and women – return to faith in God for healing and restoration (Block 1999a:54). This would restore the equality in the relationship between men and women in the way it was originally set out in Genesis 1:28 and 2:18 (see 6.3.4.3). This is also what YHWH intended in the covenantal

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Men started to control women's sexuality to provide food to legitimate children (Ginn 2010; cf Stearns et al 2011:6).

Lerner (1986:49-50) comments that women began to be regarded as possessions and their reproductive capabilities as a 'tribal resource' for future labour that would increase food production (Lerner 1986:49-50). Women were traded and became a means of personal enrichment. Men began to 'mystify production' and by taking control over 'food, knowledge and women' acquired power over younger men. In the process, matrilocal and matrilineal systems were dissolved in what Lerner (1986:50) terms as the 'historic defeat' of womanhood.

<sup>79</sup> In my opinion, the abuse of women in the Book of Judges is a symptom of periods of imbalance in the equality of the power arrangement between men and women. Though the dominant cultural ideology favoured patriarchy, this is not to say that patriarchy was abusive at all times in the pre-monarchic period. These abuses were not culturally accepted and were abhorred by the people (cf Jdg 19:30, 21:16). Violence against women cannot be blamed on the purported patriarchal social structures religion of the Israelites. Since it allowed women their autonomy, women too were capable of violent acts (Jdg 4-5; 9:53). As the moral values of their community broke down, all the people were vulnerable to all types of abuses of power, cruelty, crimes and violence (cf Jdg 17:6; 21:25).



relationship with His people.

In the following segment, I will discuss the incident in Judges 11:24-39 and I will also refer to certain incidents in Judges 19-21 in an attempt to describe the type of male rule that gave rise to 'total' and oppressive patriarchy in the periods after the pre-monarchy.

e. Jephthah's daughter a sign of the times to come

The fate of Jephthah's daughter is a sign of the future times to come when women would be betrayed, raped, abused, killed and forced into marriage in (an anti-covenantal) social system antithetical and lethal to women (cf Jdg 19-21). Judges 11:34-39 is construed (by feminists) as an episode of abusive patriarchal authority over a daughter. Jephthah's unnamed daughter is powerless, the victim of her father's vow in a cruel male-dominated system in which she is unable to act autonomously (Exum 1994:16-118).

Apparently, the odds (that is, the dominant cultural ideology) are certainly not in her favour. She is a female child born in a community where male offspring are preferred. She is the granddaughter of another type of woman who might be living on the fringes of the Israelite society: the harlot (Jdg 11:1; see Chapter 6). She is the 'innocent victim' of a seemingly misguided father who through the ritual act of sacrifice transforms murder into a socially acceptable act of execution (Exum 1994:18). This he does (kills his daughter) in order to maintain his honour in the community (Jdg 11:39).

Jephthah has made a vow to sacrifice anything that came through the door of his house if God gave him military victory over the Ammonites (Jdg 11:30). When he returns home, the first person to meet him is his daughter (Jdg 11:34). Though consensus cannot be reached on the final destiny of the daughter (see Exum 1994:16-21 and Wiersbe 2007:457 who both have different ideas about the daughter's fate), it does appear that she was sacrificed (Jdg 11:39).<sup>80</sup>

Coffman (1999c) states that Jephthah could not have sacrificed his daughter as a burnt offering according to his vow in Judges 11:31. This act would have been an abomination to the Israelites (cf Bullinger 1922a). Jamieson, Fausset and Brown (1888c) hold that it was clear that Jephthah's vow was unvoiced and not communicated to anyone

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<sup>80</sup> As distressing as it seems, I tend to go with the indication in Judges 11:39 that the daughter was sacrificed. Considering Judges 17:6 and 21:25, it seems that in that topsy-turvy and violent world, any religious practice was acceptable (cf Jdg 8:22-27, 33-34; 17:1-5).

as his household would have taken precautions and placed someone else in the doorway of his house. It is possible, however, that the daughter was cognisant of her father's vow but elected to fulfil her customary duty as his daughter to commemorate his military victory by meeting him with joy, probably singing, dancing and drumming (cf Ex 15:20; 1 Sm 18:6; Gunn 2005:156-157). She did not dispute her father's vow and willingly agreed to surrender her life (Jdg 11:36). Whatever the final completion of Jephthah's vow, the daughter knew that she forfeited a future as a wife and mother, which she emphasized in Judges 11:36.

However, instead of calling this distressing episode in the Book of Judges the social norm and a consequence of patriarchy, one should rather call it the result of the erosion of individual morality within the system of benevolent patriarchy (Cundall & Morris 2011:128; cf Stone 2009b). Jephthah, and the Benjamites (cf Jdg 19) who raped and killed the concubine, were acting outside of YHWH's laws. The syncretic religious practices and customs of the Canaanite (Gileadite) religions also seem to have had a big influence on the behaviour of Jephthah and possibly the Benjamites who had demanded to violate the husband of the concubine at first (Jdg 19:22). The vow Jephthah made (Jdg 11:30), for example, contained elements of the Canaanite cultic influence since, according to Wiersbe (2007:457), YHWH 'did not approve or accept human sacrifice'. YHWH valued all human life.

When the people were loyal to YHWH, men and women's lives were commonly defined by the covenantal laws under YHWH's rule of the people. Both genders could flourish under YHWH's grace and beneficence, enjoying the equality that comes with the sharing of authority. It was an impairment in this delicate balance of mutual power between men and women through the breakdown of the covenantal laws (cf Jdg 19 1-30) that led to the near extinction of the Benjamites (cf Jdg 20:48) and the misguided attempts of the elders to correct a dire situation (cf Jdg 21:12-12, 23). It is extremely significant that on two occasions, before and after the events in Judges 19-21, the text: 'In those days Israel had no king' (Jdg 19:1 and Jdg 21:25) appear. The passage is extended to include: 'and everyone did as he saw fit' (in Judges 21:25; 17:6). Judges 19:1 foreshadows the events in the chapter as well as the following ones, while Judges 21:15 is a reiteration and a conclusion; one period ends and another begins (Cundall & Morris 2011:128-129).

As mentioned above, the Israelites had broken the covenant with YHWH and abandoned Him as their God and King (cf Jdg 2:1-3; 1 Sm 8:7; cf Brensinger 1999:192; Cundall & Morris 2011:127-128). Consequently, the destabilisation of the structures that presented stability, ‘the Levitical priesthood, hospitality and family life, eldership and the assembly of tribal leaders’, were brought about by the ‘moral bankruptcy of individuals’ (Cundall & Morris 2011:128). Everyone suffered under the failed social structures of the Israelites; both men and women. The Israelites had abandoned their Divine King in favour of doing as they saw fit (Jdg 17:6; 21:25). The equal position that women had before the Lord was violently interrupted in Judges 11:34-39 and 19-21. It is during this time that the crimes against women in Judges 11:34-39 and 19-21 occur and which sets the stage for ‘total’ patriarchal control of women in the subsequent historical periods.

#### *2.4.1.2 The benevolent father in the ‘house of the father’ (bêt āb)*

In the Hebrew Bible, the word *paterfamilias* finds its equivalent in the Hebrew term *āb* (father or master), meaning ‘one abundant in authority and wisdom’ and one who ruled over his household in justice and parity (Benner 2005:253). One example of this type of benevolent father can be found in Judges 1. In Judges 1:14-15, the woman Achsah requests land with water from her father Caleb (cf 2.5.1; 5.5.2.1a; 6.3.2a). Her father responds with kindness despite being confronted with a miscalculation in his behaviour and public dishonour in the event of this exposure.



Caleb concedes respectfully to his daughter’s request. This type of behaviour, kindness and respect together with generosity and fairness is what God intended to characterise the authority of the fathers of His chosen people (Le Roux 2015:512). Therefore, though the dominant cultural ideology was patriarchal, male authority, I believe, was beneficial to women as demonstrated by the character of Caleb. In another instance of parental equality in the pre-monarchic household, the mother of Samson remonstrated with her husband against their son’s choice for a wife (Jdg 14:2-3). Still other characters in the Book of Judges provide validity for women’s authority in the persons of Deborah (Jdg 4-5) and the mother of Micah (Jdg 17:1-3) who appears to be the head of Micah’s household.

From these instances of female authority, it can be inferred that the *bêt āb* was not the singular ruling power in the Iron Age I household. With the rule of the house of the

father came the equally influential and authoritative rule of the house of the mother (cf 5.5.1, 5.3.1.3; cf Meyers 2014:8-27).

#### 2.4.1.3 *The authority of bêt āb*

##### a. The household

The term *bêt āb* is also a designation derived from the ancient Hebrew pictographic ‘alphabet’ in which the symbols  ‘tent’ and  ‘head’ joined together means ‘head of the family’ or household (Benner 2005:253). Accordingly, Meyers maintains that the *bêt āb* (house of the father) does not automatically represent male autocracy but rather male lineage which indicates elements of mutual dependence between all the family members (Meyers 1988:39-41, 130). Conventional theories about patriarchy (as well as its origins), however, do not frequently consider the existence of fairness and equality practised by the father of the household (cf Jdg 1:14-15; cf 2.4.1.1 a, b, c; 2.4.1.2; 2.4.1.3; a; b). However, it is this variation in the persona of the *paterfamilias* (or *bêt āb*) as benefactor (Schloen 2001:88) that has led to difficulties in understanding and defining patriarchy in the Bible (cf 2.4.1; Meyers 2014:9). There are two sides to the *paterfamilias* or the *bêt āb* that emerge, i.e. the despotic rule of the father as opposed to the benevolent rule of the father. Each of these types of rule surface according to a specific point of view. Some hold to the idea that the proto-Israelite women and men’s participation in their households and communities were based on economic, social and political equality. In my opinion, it is this as well as the equality given to men and women during YHWH’s covenantal rule of his people (cf Meyers 2003a:185-197; Ackerman 2003:173-184; Ebeling 2010:147). This is contrary to the traditional view of the disempowered female who performed her duties and experienced her lived reality under the oppressive male rule.

The authority or domination of the father expanded over all his family members including his sons and the extended family (King & Stager 2001:36-40).<sup>81</sup> According to Judges 17:6 and 21:25, it appears that early Israel (or the tribal society of pre-monarchic

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<sup>81</sup> The family or *bêt āb* could include up to three generations. A household with more than three generations was called the *mišpāhā* or clan. King and Stager (2001:36) describe the household in Exodus 20:17 as including ‘the wives, slaves and livestock’ and in which the ‘ultimate authority was the father, the *paterfamilias*’ (italics mine).

period), in the absence of governmental authority<sup>82</sup> (as well as the Israelite abolition of YHWH's theocracy), had dissolved (periodically) into a state of anarchy. But patrimonialism<sup>83</sup> (see 1.5), a social structure formed by the households of the *bêt āb* (Weber 1968:1028), would have maintained some manner of order. Adams comments that male rule is the 'logical form of traditional authority' (Adams [sa]:3; cf Weber 1947:63), and traditional male dominance is considered almost impossible without certain privileges that include not only age and lineage (Adams [sa]:2-3), but also wealth.

Consequently, I believe that a characteristic of patriarchy in the pre-monarchic community was the enablement and maintenance of benevolent male rule in a theocratic system through the economic power and the wealth produced in the household by both men and women in the family. Wealth distinguished the Biblical patriarchs from more subordinate males in their own eras, and the same was true in the period of the Judges (Adams [sa]:7). Though life was hard for the tribes in the pre-monarchic era, YHWH promised to bless them according to Deuteronomy 28. Ideally, women's contributions towards the generation of wealth in the households would have been recognised and valued by the men in their families particularly within the theocratic organisational system of the community that was favourable to women as well (cf 2.2.2; 2.2.2.1; 2.3.4).

Contrary to the archaeological evidences that reveal the ostensible poverty of the Israelites on the central highlands of early Israel the Bible narratives indicate that certain men in Judges were quite wealthy. According to Judges 10:2-4, Jair, one of the 'minor judges', was affluent. Each of his 30 sons possessed his own donkey – a symbol of rank and wealth, and each son ruled over his own city (Meyer 1997). Similarly, Ibzan, another minor judge, was wealthy and a man of importance. He had 30 sons and 30 daughters and could afford to send his daughters outside his clan for marriage and bring in wives from other clans to marry his sons. In addition, Abdon was a man of great prosperity and status in Judges 12:8-15 (Meyer 1997).

One can hardly imagine the women in the households of Jair, Ibzan and Abdon and

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<sup>82</sup> Government authority would have been kingship rule, which was 'nearly the exclusive form of government in the ancient Near East' (Mckenzie [sa]).

<sup>83</sup> Bendix (1977:360) views patrimonialism as a form of government symbolised by the relationship between paternal authority, exercised by the *paterfamilias*, and familial reliance.

other well-off landowners such as Micah (Jdg17-18) assisting, to an overwhelming degree, in generating the prosperity that preserved ‘the abusive and oppressive rule’ of the *bêt āb*. Women's management of the household and control of the domestic economy led to concomitant authority for women on par with that of the men in their households.<sup>84</sup> It is inconceivable that the women who were aware of their valuable participation in the economically productive domestic environment (Ackerman 2003:173-184) and its expansion into the wider community would have willingly conceded to support and uphold oppressive male rule. In the religious and social upheavals of their time, it was women who could provide the type of economic and religious stability (cf women's cultic and economic behaviour in Chapter Four and Five) that, in addition to YHWH's grace, prevented the Israelites from destroying themselves. Later it would be women's roles and productive and reproductive contributions that provided a solid economic foundation for the Monarchy established in the second part of the Iron Age I.

Subsequently, many of the pre-monarchic women could not have lived in a continuous state of disempowerment given the wealth produced and the authority that came with wealth. Similarly, the ordinary women whose lives are not discernable are marked by a sense of power and autonomy through their actions and abilities (cf Jdg 4:21; 9:53, 11:36, 14:2-3; 16:1-20; 17:1-4; and 19:2). These women are indicative of a societal organisation that could not have been the patriarchy that feminists perceive it to be (cf 2.2.2-2.2.2.1).

#### b. The community (extended family)

Patrimonialism in the household was also extended into the broader community. The blend of private and public authority was important to ensure the achievement of communal goals such as the production and distribution of food. Order between community members to

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<sup>84</sup> A subsistence economy that was centred on and around the household was the base of the agrarian society in the pre-monarchic period. Wilk and Rathje (1982:618) define a household as ‘the most common social component of subsistence, the smallest and most abundant activity group’ and as a ‘unit of economic and social cooperation’ that not always but often ‘resides under a single roof’. Yanagisako (1979:164-165) views a household as a group of people who live in the same residence and perform domestic activities together, including ‘food production and consumption, sexual reproduction and childrearing’.

Deist (2000:143) appropriately describes the early Israelite economy as the ‘management of a household’; as the Israelite household was the ‘backbone of the economic system’ (Deist 2000:143). King and Stager (2001:192) concur that the Israelite household was the hub of agro pastoralists’ economic activities. Combined, these definitions convey several facts about women's lives, familial and productive activities in the pre-monarchic period.

ensure smooth running in the delegation and management of tasks and the achievement of community goals by all the members were necessary. The *bêt āb*, therefore, had to possess great organisational and managerial skills. The father also had to safeguard the safety of community members, fields, crops and animals under his authority from the frequent attacks by the enemy mentioned in the Book of Judges (cf Jdg 6). The Book of Judges does not recount too many complaints or uprisings by the people against their community leaders (cf Jdg 21:22).<sup>85</sup> It can therefore be deduced that it was benevolent leaders who held control and who ruled in general amiability. These leaders apparently had the preservation and wellbeing of his community in mind instead of oppressive rule.

Evidence for benign male rule can be seen in the careful planning of settlements. The meticulous development of settlements reveals the efficient control by which the *bêt āb* safeguarded his community. A compound consisting of five buildings was excavated at Tell-en-Nasbeh. The archaeological data indicates that this compound housed an extended family made up of three nuclear families whose houses were joined (Brody 2011:237). Although belonging to Iron Age II, the dwellings uncovered would have been similar to the Iron Age I four-roomed residences uncovered all over Israel – Hazor in the north to Tel Masos in the south and in other sites, Tell Beit Mirsim and Tel Beersheba (Netzer 1992:193).

Stager has interpreted the archaeological data to indicate that the occupation of the Hill Lands was organised into several family compounds with each compound containing an extended family or the *bêt āb* (Stager 1985:18-23). Not only did the meticulous arrangement of Israelite households facilitate benevolent patriarchal rule, it would also have allowed male leadership necessary to effectively oversee the production and distribution of goods. The organisation of clusters of dwellings around a central courtyard with minimum access from the outside would also have assisted the *paterfamilias* in providing adequate security for his family (Schloen 2001:79, 109).

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<sup>85</sup> However, intertribal conflict occurred in the Book of Judges (Jdg 18:1-31, 20:1-46). The Ephraimites criticised Gideon for not inviting them to fight against the Midianites, primarily because they could not participate in the acquisition of the war booty (Jdg 8:1-3). The citizens of Shechem revolted against Abimelech (Jdg 9:22) to avenge the death of his seventy brothers (Jdg 9:3). The Israelites, however, mostly suffered under their mutual enemies (Jdg 3:8-9, 14-15; 6:6).

The authority of the benevolent father was intended to serve, provide for and protect the family (Schloen 2001:79, 109). Therefore, it can be assumed that the women in such a household would have been psychologically induced to work for the betterment of their household. However, where the father's authority was often left unchallenged and unrestrained, 'he could do and say anything he wished' (Pain 2005:278; cf Jdg 11:34-39). Judges 19-21 are instances when the benevolence of the 'fathers' had disintegrated to such an extent that (Jdg 10-14; 19-21) it led to the crimes against the young women of Jabesh Gilead (Jdg 21:12-13; 21:23). Such behaviour, however, appears to have been the exception rather than the rule (cf Jdg 19:30).

Meyers, as mentioned above (see 2.4.1.3), believes that disparities in cultural contexts between early and modern times, amongst others, have made Biblical patriarchy problematic to demarcate (Meyers 2014:9). The focus of feminist scholars has been on the darker side of male rule. Their own biases are confronting them with a patriarchy that is 'limiting, harsh, enslaving or (an) oppressive system...that is painful to consider' ([insertion mine], Meyers 1988:25-26). These scholars do not consider that the Iron Age I period was an age of decentralised and harsh village existence. Thus, 'gender mutuality and interdependence' and concomitant female authority was fostered in this context (Meyers 1988:187). Though male authority (in the form of patrimonialism) existed, as explained above, 'there was no connotation of misogyny, the oppression of females, or the notion of female inferiority' to this type of male rule, according to Meyers (1988:187). Bellis (1994:57) comments that in her research forays into the lives of women in the Old Testament, Meyers 'depicts a life of hard work<sup>86</sup> but of much greater gender equality than we might have expected in this early period in Biblical history'.

## 2.5 PATRIARCHY IN CERTAIN CULTURAL CONTEXTS: TRADITIONAL VERSUS MEYERS

### 2.5.1 The marriage of Achsah and Othniel

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<sup>86</sup> In a description of the hard labour of the (pre-monarchic) tribal community, Bellis (1994: 64-65) mentions the construction of terraces and cisterns for water conservation and irrigation of the terraces, and the large labour force that required the participation of both men and women to build and maintain the terraces and in the sowing, cultivation and harvesting of crops. In addition, women's reproductive activities and associated tasks meant a contribution in labor of up to 40 percent.



As mentioned previously, feminists declare that patriarchy is an abusive system of male dominance over women. But not only over women but also nature (Zerzan 2010). Men took authority over women's sexuality to ensure, among others, that their inheritances were bestowed on male heirs that were biologically theirs (Christ 2013).

In Judges 1:12-13 Caleb promises to give his daughter Achsah in marriage to the man who captures the city of Debir (Jdg 1:11). Othniel proceeds to attack Debir and wins Achsah (Jdg 1:13). Apparently, this announcement is made without her knowledge or consent. These texts would be an illustration of how the Hebrew male through inter-marriage took control over women's reproductive abilities to let property and land remain in the clan.

On the other hand, in keeping with an observation by Meyers (1988:187), the scenario above would also be an example of feminists misreading a text and attributing modern cultural values and contexts to it. The people involved in the narrative were only acting according to the tradition and norms of their time, inexplicable as they may appear to the modern mind.

Consequently, I would like to propose the following interaction between Achsah and Othniel that could be typical of (equal) marital partners in the pre-monarchy. This type of male-female partnership could represent a more benevolent type of male rule. It is probable that Achsah knew Othniel, the man who won her hand in marriage. Othniel was male kin of Caleb (Jdg 1:11). He would have been known in the community for his skills as a warrior. This might have given him the status of high eligibility for marriage – Achsah came from a wealthy family (cf Jdg 1:14-15). Both Achsah and Othniel appear to be an appropriate fit for each other in marriage. Othniel later became a renowned judge (Jdg 3:7-11), which seemed to verify his earlier respectability and suitability as a husband for Achsah. One cannot discard the notion that a certain fondness for Achsah might have inspired Othniel to seize Debir. Would she have been allowed to refuse to marry Othniel? According to Judges 1:14-15, Achsah displayed her autonomy in asking for land with water, which seems to be above and beyond her allotted dowry. Since she was able to make important requests, this might be indicative that Achsah willingly entered into marriage with Othniel. In the spirit of building a community in their new homeland, it is possible that Achsah acceded and participated in the marriage to Othniel voluntarily. It does not

seem to have impaired her autonomy or her authority at all (cf Jdg 14-15). This is, after all, what YHWH intended for men and women to have under His theocracy.

In modern times, it would be hard not to imagine Achsah as an exploited woman, a mere object in the war games of patriarchal men. However, the context within which Othniel and Achsah's marriage occurred should be considered. The pre-monarchic era was a period of intense land conquest and settlement (see 2.3). Alliances between groups were forged and broken (cf Jdg 4:10, 17; 11:1-11; 8:1-8; 9; 20; 21). Intermarriage between members of a kinship group (Jdg 1:13) as well as outside the kinship group (Jdg 12:9)<sup>87</sup> functioned to consolidate bonds and to establish (geographical) boundaries and peaceful relations between communities (Frevel & Rausche 2012).

Apparently, the men and women understood the importance of these coalitions. Achsah and the daughters of Ibzan and those brought into his clan recognised the vital role they had to play in ensuring that amicable relations were maintained inside and outside the clan. The women also knew that the 'loyalty and obligation' of their husbands was firstly to them and only then to their 'consanguineous kin' (Simkins 2011:9). Therefore, women were always assured that their positions in the household and family would be protected first and above all else. Far from being subjugated, the authority and ingeniousness of the woman Achsah (Niditch 2001:178; cf Jdg 1:14-15) is probably representative of the women in her era.<sup>88</sup> Devoted women assumedly entered into marriage with the knowledge that under YHWH's protective leadership, their status alongside their husbands were secure and that in the heterarchical arrangements within their households, they could gain (in addition to their status as wives) added authority and independence.

### **2.5.2 Patriarchy and warfare**

The belief that patriarchy is 'rooted in the ethos of war to procure dominance over property and resources'<sup>89</sup> is a defining character of male domination (Christ 2013). The conquest of

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<sup>87</sup> Frevel and Rausche (2012) discuss the different type of marriages indicated in the Old Testament; see also Grunlan and Mayers (1988:147).

<sup>88</sup> Webb (2012:196) comments that some women in the Book of Judges (Achsah and Delilah) are 'shrewd and able to manipulative men to their own advantage'. It is possible, but in my opinion, they were doing what needed to be done to ensure that their households thrive.

<sup>89</sup> Palaeolithic rock art depicts no evidence of 'group conflict' (Guthrie 2005:422) within the earliest community where food and territory was enough for all. However, the absence of archaeological evidence for warfare in the earliest populations does not proof that violence and aggression were not present in

land and occupation of territory in the Book of Judges seem to fit perfectly within this mold of patriarchy and warfare.<sup>90</sup> As the men went about making war, women became part of

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Palaeolithic populations. Anthropological studies show that Neolithic populations were aggressive and violent male-dominated societies. Boehm (2014), using contemporary hunter-gatherers as a template for behaviour in Palaeolithic groups, records that these societies exhibited aggressive behaviour and violence within the groups as well as in intertribal combat.

With improved hunting weapons, for example, came an increase in male aggression and violence (see Guiseppi 2000). As societies developed into more sophisticated cultures, male domination and aggression intensified. Kohn writes that aggression is learned behaviour and linked to 'external stimuli' (Kohn 1988). Hunting animals for food involves conflict and aggression (Boehm 2014) in other words they serve as 'external stimuli' (Kohn 1988). In addition, territoriality, rivalry for (food) resources created disparities in power between groups which are incentives for aggressive and dominant behaviour as well as warfare (Wrangham 1999; Wrangham & Glowacki 2012:6).

<sup>90</sup> Some believe that the creation stories in the Book of Genesis should be interpreted allegorically. Ngo (2016) comments that the narratives in Genesis were written to provide answers to questions about the world, people's lives and why they do certain things. Questions of how violence began and why it exists in modern times may be answered by looking at the incident between Cain and Abel in Genesis (Slomp 2009:19; Jacoby 2011:82; Myers 2015; cf Hendel [sa]).

The murder of Abel by his brother Cain might be the beginning of male aggression and violence in the Bible that spread to successive (Israelite) communities (cf Gn 6:5, 11; Wiesel 1998; Jacoby 2011:63-64; cf Myers 2015; cf Carr [sa]). One may believe that the family of Adam, in the book of Genesis are metaphors for the first (Palaeolithic hunter-gathering) societies. Evidence indicates that a global flood did occur that might verify the account of Noah's flood in Genesis (Morris 1999) and by extension the existence of the garden of Eden. For further reading on possible locations of the garden of Eden, cf Hamblin (1987); Walker (2001) and Lockyer ([ed]1986:318-320) as well as Cline (2009).

Let us, therefore, look at the incident I will describe next as the start of male aggression and domination in the Old Testament, be that an allegorical or an actual event. As mentioned previously, the first incidence of violence in the Old Testament occurs in the Book of Genesis (Gn 4:1-16). Cain, in a fit of jealousy and rage, slays his brother Abel (Wiesel 1998; Volf 1999:18-19; Nauta 2009:65-71). This incident comes as a complete surprise for we expect this first family to have much trouble working the soil and therefore concentrate all their efforts on land management (cf Gn 3:17-19; Boer 2015).

We anticipate arduous and unrelenting labour and related discontent, perhaps, coming from Adam and Eve's offspring. Murder, the shedding of blood, however, is an unexpected and alarming twist in the storyline. Perhaps there was a different, non-aggressive side to Cain that motivated him to work the land instead of raising sheep. Sheep farming included providing shelter and food as well as protection from wild animals (Keil & Delitzsch 2017). But raising sheep also involved the slaughter of these animals for domestic and ritual purposes (cf Gn 4:4; Henry 2017).

Perhaps Cain, due to his mother's gentler and maternal influences, preferred therefore to grow food (Volf 1999:32). In this narrative, Eve, however, is helpless to stop her son from disobeying God (Gn 4:6-7; Keil & Delitzsch 2017), even as the mother of Samson was unable to prevent her son from going his rebellious ways (Jdg 14-16). It seems that there was an escalation of anger and envy inside Cain (Gn 4:5; Skinner 1910:106). Unable to heed God's warning against sinning (Gn 4:7) and unable contain his fury, Cain finally slayed his brother (Gn 4:9).

It was the corruption of his moral conduct and rectitude that led Cain to commit murder (Volf 1999:31-32). Similarly, in Judges the degradation of moral fibre and righteousness led Samson to make his own rules (Jdg 14:1) and live a decadent lifestyle (Jdg 16). Moral deficiency also leads to the acts of violence perpetrated against the women in the Book of Judges (Jdg 19; 21-22). After being expelled from Eden, Adam and his family augmented their diet with meat (Schwartz 2015). This was possibly obtained by hunting. It does, however, appear that the domestication of sheep was relatively swift and smooth after the expulsion from Eden (Gn 4:4). Nevertheless, Cain may have been predisposed to violent behaviour through his exposure to the hunting of animals, either through his personal involvement in or observations of his father or Abel hunting for food (Farrell & Bruce 2010:3).

the spoils of war (cf Jdg 5:30; 21:12-13, 23) with which they could enrich themselves. It is thus easy to see the women in the Book of Judges as assets to gain or lose in the wars that fill the pre-monarchic period.

However, the Israelites were driven by a certain religious ideology when they acquired territory in Canaan. According to the Biblical narratives, God made a covenant with Abraham (Gn 15:18-21; 17:1-9), which He renewed with Isaac (Gn 26:3) and confirmed with Jacob (Gn 28:13-15). YHWH would be the God of the Israelites and He promised to be their God (see the Mosaic covenant 4.3.1.2) and to greatly multiply their

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That, as well as defending the family from wild beasts, may have led him to draw associations between violence and domination and may account for his own murderous reactions (Huesmann & Kirwil 2007:546). Cain killed Abel because he believed by removing a rival (his brother), he secured a better position for him in his 'society' (see Eisner 2009:41; cf Davis 1994:164; Bess 2012). In the process, he might have believed that he could acquire additional resources and territory. But above all and in a twisted sense, Cain perhaps believed that in killing his brother, he would gain God's favour (cf Gn 4:5; Skinner 1910:104-105; Kim 2009b). This first act of aggression tumbled a society into a series of unending violence and a struggle for domination between people groups.

The ethos of equality in the relationship between the man and women in Eden (the utopia of feminist theorists), probably existed beyond the garden as well, as evinced by the assertive and autonomous characters of the matriarchs and later the women in the Book of Judges (Meyers 1988:3-4).

However, the disintegration of the balance of power between men and women had begun from the moment the man and woman were expelled from the Eden; the golden age of humanity (Trible 1973:47; Wimberly 1997:18; Kimelman 1998; cf Meyers 1988:3-4; Stratton 1995:99-101). Further alterations in the human persona were brought about by environmental and climatic changes, social adaptations, scarcity and impoverishment (cf Gn 4:12; 6-9). Perhaps this was the climate change proposed by Dow, Olewiler and Reed (2005:1) and Bar-Yosef and Price (2011:177) that ushered in an agricultural shift.

Additional factors such as the militant 'culture' in the pre-monarchic age, caused the Israelites to have experienced a past inundated with conflict, violence, and oppression, at times directed against their own kind. Male aggression and violence had disastrous consequences for Israelite women at times (cf Jdg 19 and 21). The result of trying to address a problem in Judges 21:1-3 were the capture and forceful marriage of young women.

Beginning with Cain, there is a steady development of male aggression into male domination in the ages after the pre-monarchic period (Meyers 1978:91-103; cf Abraham 2002:161). Indeed, aggression, war and violence are part and parcel of tribal life at that time, but so also loyalty (cf Jdg 13), respect (cf Jdg 1:14-15), cooperation and equal partnerships between women and men (cf Jdg 14:1-5; cf 17:1-4). The idea that aggression and male dominance are the consequences of man's fallen nature as narrated in Genesis 1 should not be implausible at all.

Male aggression and violence is thus not culturally or ecologically rooted. Neither is it the result of the development of agriculture, the formation of cities, permanent settlement and subsequent emergence of a ruling elite. Rather, it is the result of man's disconnection from God, the refusal to obey His laws and covenants. Cain's aggression and violence are the effects of sin, patriarchy and war at the time of the development of agriculture are the effects of sinful human nature.

In the science of archaeology, the effects of sin are evident in the material culture. According to Genesis 1 (Gn 1:28), women shared equal rule with men and there is indication of continuity of this into the pre-monarchic age. It is women's subjugation and oppression that should be seen as astonishing and not the idea that they once shared full equality, authority and rights with men.

numbers.<sup>91</sup> He also promised the entire land of Canaan to the Israelite tribes as an inheritance. The behaviour of Sarah in Genesis 16:1-6 and 21:9 should be viewed in the context of the covenant God had made with Abraham, and particularly since God had made Sarah an equal party alongside Abraham in the covenant. Previously YHWH had entered into a covenant with Abraham in which Abraham was promised that his descendants would inherit Canaan (Gn 15:18-21; 17:1-9). In this covenant Sarah, whom YHWH said would be the mother of nations, had an equal share with Abraham, who would become the father of nations (cf Gn 15:18-21; 17:1-9; see 4.3.1).

The actions of Rebecca (Gn 27:1-17), Leah and Rachel (Gn 30:1-22) should also be placed in the framework of the covenant God had made with Abraham and Sarah. At the time of the Judges, women's identity and participatory role within the covenant had been well established (cf Jdg 5:7). They would have understood that their continued involvement in the covenant required a social organisation, such as benevolent patrimonialism as an organisation of rule. In this system, the *bêt āb* established order and control in their community, ensuring the safety of all the people so that both the man and the women reached community goals necessary for survival and prosperity. Ideally, the *bêt āb* would have also safeguarded the continuance of the covenant the people had made with YHWH. The values expressed in Genesis 1:28 and 2:18, which may have been upheld by the men and women, required the equal involvement of both men and women within system of rule that was beneficial to men and women alike. Oppressive patriarchy ideally did not have a place in the upholding of the covenant since it was contrary to YHWH's desire of equality for men and women in their relationship with Him and with one another in their households and in their community.

Consequently, I believe that the capture and forcible marriages of the young women of Jabesh Gilead and Shiloh should be seen in context of the deterioration of the covenant (cf Jdg 21:15-16) YHWH made with Abraham and Moses, the latter of which was reconfirmed by Joshua (see 4.3.1-4.3.1.2a). The rape and abduction of the young women should also be viewed considering the erosion of the compassionate and benevolent father within the decaying theocratic system. The Book of Judges does not record the aggression

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<sup>91</sup> The covenant included the promise that Abraham would be the father of a multitude of nations and therefore cannot be interpreted in a physical sense but rather that all nations who adopted the faith of Abraham in God would in this way be blessed through Abraham (Gn 17:4; Piper 1983).

of men against women to have been the culturally accepted norm.<sup>92</sup> It does, however, record the misguided decisions that led to death and suffering of both men and women by morally impaired leaders (Jdg 21:10-11, 20-22).

## 2.6 WOMEN AND MALE RULE

### 2.6.1 Male rule in the pre-monarchic setting

Women's daily reality in the pre-monarchic period was inextricably bound to that of the family beneath the (benevolent) rule of the father. Gravett et al (2008:114-115) note that in ancient Israelite society, 'courthouses, public schools, synagogues... hospitals and funeral homes' were non-existent. The tasks performed by these organisations were undertaken inside the household of the Israelite family. Law, education and the care of the dead were all under the control of the father or the head of the household. In addition to these functions, the head of the family had authority over the life and death of his wife and children, according to certain Biblical texts (Gn 22:1-9; Jdg 11:29-40; Ex 21:7-11). The law, however, also sets limits to the father's authority. Instead of only the father, both parents could determine the punishment for a rebellious child, such as the one in Deuteronomy 21:18. If he/she did not heed the parent's admonition, they could be taken to the elders in the city gate to be stoned to death (Dt 21:19-21).<sup>93</sup>

This passage ascertains that the large community could revoke the decisions made by the father if it served the interest of the community. Hence, whatever ultimate or final authority the male head might have possessed, at least in formal or public contexts, mothers also held considerable, if not precisely equal power over household dependents, be they children, slaves, or servants (cf Jdg 4:7; 14:2-3; 17:1-4; Gravett et al 2008:115). An example of a mother's authority that might parallel that of the father might be indicated in Judges 14:2-5 (cf 5.1.1, 5.3, 5.3.1.3).

The laws and traditions that defined a woman's household and that gave it value

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<sup>92</sup> The Book of Judges is filled with episodes of war (see 2.3). In the first chapter of Judges, the Israelite tribes went to war against the inhabitants of Canaan to procure land, resources and cities. Yet there were many years of peace as well. The Book of Judges does not record any sign of male aggressiveness in the community or households. The event in Judges 19 seems to be an exception to the rule. The outrage expressed by the communities against the heinous acts committed against the concubine of the Levite in Judges 19:30 apparently verifies this.

<sup>93</sup> This type of punishment does not appear to be benevolent. I hardly believe that any parent would subject their offspring to such a fate. Perhaps the law was there to remind children and parents of the gravity of teaching and obeying the law.

and functionality (may have) operated within the framework of the structures of male authority prevalent in her community (cf Jdg 1:14-15; Matthews 2003a:2). However, it seems that male authority was beneficial to women and they could acquire status and authority within it, particularly since, in my opinion, YHWH encouraged equality between men and women. It is within this social and familial construction that a woman experienced her reality, which shaped her worldviews, in which setting she obeyed the customs and laws (2.2.2; 2.2.2.1; 2.3.3; 4.3.1) and that at times made her concede to (adverse) male authority (cf Jdg 11:36). Jephthah's (an example of a misguided *paterfamilias*) daughter did not have any say in her father's decision to sacrifice her, but she acted very mature in the narrative (cf 2.4.1.1 d).

Conventional images of the obedient and submissive women in antiquity do not correspond with the strong and authoritative women in the Bible (Phipps 1992:9). Achsah, for example, was determined to acquire land from her father and set out to do exactly that; Jael and the woman of Thebez each killed a military leader, and the mother of Samson showed more courage than her husband in Judges 13:23. While the family was under the rule of the father who had final (and legal) decision-making power, Biblical narratives reveal 'that in practice women often took the lead in decisions affecting the family and acted on their own initiative' (Meyers 1988:31; Fletcher 1997).

In the following segment, I would like to substantiate the previous statement by providing the actions of Deborah, described below as an instance in which a woman could and did take up a leadership position alongside a man and exhibited independent decision-making power in the variant patriarchy of the pre-monarchy, also discussed above (see 2.4.1.1 a, b, c; 2.4.1.2; 2.4.1.3; a; b).

Deborah probably would not have gone to war with Barak against Sisera, the Canaanite army general, if Barak did not insist on her presence (cf 4.3.7.1; Jdg 4:8). Barak was, after all, a warrior and a leader and, according to Deborah's message, elected by YHWH to deliver his people from Canaanite domination (Phillips 2004; cf Martin 1975:53; Chisholm 2013:227). Deborah's authority and status as wife, prophet and ruler of the Israelite community was already well established, as mentioned before (Cundall & Morris 2011:182; McCann 2011:51; cf Moore 1895:116; Martin 1975:66; Gunn 2005:10, 53). However, she required a man to lead the tribes in war, a role YHWH had given to Barak

(McCann 2011:52; Alter 2013:270). For this reason, she could have refused Barak's request with impunity. She did not (Moore 1895:116; Alter 2013:266-267). Deborah did warn Barak, however, that he would suffer the disgrace of not claiming victory over Sisera for she predicted that Sisera would be handed over to a woman (cf 4.3.7.1; Jdg 4:9; Alter 2013:267).

Although Deborah assured Barak that God had promised the Israelites military victory, Barak remained unconvinced for he let her know that there would not be a war without her presence close to the battlefield. Because of a lack of courage and faith (Moore 1895:117; Alter 2013:270-271), Barak imposed on Deborah his own conditions for going to war and thus acted outside the will of YHWH for him (Burney 1920:xxxvi). Considering the predicted dishonour Barak's request would bring if she refused, it comes as a surprise that he insisted on Deborah's presence. Perhaps he would rather risk his own disgrace than a possible defeat without Deborah by his side.

However, as already mentioned, Deborah had earlier promised him certain victory over the Canaanite army through a prophecy that God would lure the Canaanites into Barak's hands (Jdg 4:6-7; Brettler 2002:112). In this manner, was Barak by insisting on Deborah's presence also imposing his authority simply as a man over a woman because of his personal lack of courage and faith? Was Barak therefore in need of emphasising his own power by confronting Deborah with an ultimatum and thereby conforming her to his will instead of the will and plan of YHWH (O'Connell 1996:104,108; Brensinger 1999:67)?

Under Deborah's leadership, he would be able to assemble the Israelite tribes (Jdg 4:10; Cundall & Morris 2011:76). Barak comes across as a blemished and weaker personality (Brensinger 1999:68; Cundall & Morris 2011:180). Concerned for the preservation of the Israelite tribes, Deborah agreed to accompany him. She was not only a woman who possessed authority and faith in God (Jdg 4:4), but also courageously took the initiative and decided to lead the tribes to victory (Jdg 4:10; 14). She was willing to 'obey' a man (Jdg 4:9) for the sake of Israel's continued survival and thus acted within YHWH's will, unlike Barak who acted in self-will.

In his reluctance to submit to YHWH's will, Barak is a model for the 'ravages of self-will gone amuck' as described in Judges (Stone 2005:604). The self-will of the men,



the opposite of YHWH's desire for them, would come to negatively affect benevolent patriarchy to the detriment of the women in the Israelite community (cf Jdg 19-21; Stone 2005:604).

### 2.6.2 Male rule and motherhood

In antiquity, marriage and particularly motherhood gave women certain authority and influence within their household and society (Lesko 1987:41-78). Among the oldest pre-historic female statuettes found were figurines of pregnant women<sup>94</sup> (Stearns et al 2011:21; Holloway 2014). These ancient figurines immortalise the timelessness of feminine significance (cf Figures 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5). They reveal how inextricably motherhood was attached to the female reality and woman's worth in society. Children safeguarded the existence of a nation and represented a continuation of the elevated station that childbirth

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<sup>94</sup> These statuettes, dated between 35 000 BC and 11 000 BC, were found across Europe, Russia and at Çatal Hüyük in Turkey (Stearns et al 2011:21; Holloway 2014). Figurines (ca 25 000 BC) of full-figured, buxom women suggest cultic activity centred on the veneration of the mother goddess and indicate that the earliest females wielded substantial authority in the wider population (Stearns et al 2011:21).

The Venus of Laussel are rock carvings dated to 25 000 BC and depict voluptuous pregnant women (see figure 2.2). Statuettes resembling the Venus of Laussel were discovered at pre-historic sites such as St.-Germain-en-Laye in France, and Çatal Hüyük and Hacilar in Turkey (see figure 2.1 and 2.3). These statuettes represent a common theme of the worship of the mother goddess and the veneration of motherhood and childbirth. A figurine of a woman sitting on a throne may indicate ruling authority (Stearns et al 1992:21).

In these early population groups and the later Natufian societies, women were also healers and the collectors of vegetable, seeds and plant sources of food. Natufian people were a sedentary community of hunter-gatherers in the Levant between 13 000 BC and 10 200 BC. They lived in subterranean houses, which were single semi-circular constructions dug into the soil and made of stone and wood (Natufian Period 2015. About education. Archaeology.about.com. From: <http://archaeology.about.com/od/nterms/qt/natufian.htm>).

Natufian settlements were found at Jericho, Ain Mallaha and Wadi Hammeh 27. Artefacts such as grinding stones, flint and bone tools for the processing of foods such as seeds, dried meats and fish were discovered as part of the Natufian tool assemblage. There is evidence that the Natufian may have grown barley and wheat (Natufian Period 2015. About education. Archaeology.about.com; cf Stearns et al 2011:15-16) and specifically rye at Tell Abu Hureyra (Zohary, Hopf & Weiss 2012:62; cf Stearns et al 2011:15). Since women were the gatherers of vegetable and plant food resources, they probably also processed the food sources mentioned above and possibly grew the barley and wheat.

Thus, women would have been indispensable in times of meat shortages when there were no animals for men to hunt. Women active as cult priestesses would have held important positions of authority in the early population groups. The Natufian people were matrilineal and matrilineal which afforded women certain authority and influence. Since they could supply the group with medicine and food in times of crises, women were given prominent positions of power (Stearns et al 2011: 6-7, 14, 16).

Pre-historic society may have found childbirth, motherhood and women's curative abilities mysterious and therefore worthy of perhaps sacred consideration and respect. As such, women might have been elevated to positions of religious and social prominence. Successive societies might have retained these ancient memories and practices associated with female authority, which might have evolved into the sacred feminine cults of Asherah, for example, as indicated in the Book of Judges (Jdg 3:7; 6:28; 10:6; Meyers 1978:91-103).

afforded a woman within her family. In the dominant cultural ideology, a barren woman was considered a disgrace and a curse (Block 2003:72).



Figure 2.1 Venus of Kostenky (ca 20 000 BC) (<http://www.visual-arts-cork.com/prehistoric/venus-of-kostenky.htm>)



Figure 2.2 Venus of Laussel (Stearns, P et al 2011:21)



Figure 2.3 Beersheba figurine. Ivory statuette of pregnant woman from Beersheba (5<sup>th</sup> - 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC) (<https://za.pinterest.com/pin/364017582355592373/>)



Figure 2.4 Hacilar figurines (ca 8 500-5 500 BC) (<https://za.pinterest.com/pin/572168327633467548>)



Figure 2.5 Pregnant woman lying on her side (<http://users.stlcc.edu/mfuller/hacilar.html>)

#### 2.6.2.1 *The mother of Samson*

Probably considered an outcast because of her sterility (Block 2003:72), the mother of Samson ostensibly was sitting, or praying according to Le Roux (2016), alone in a field, apparently friendless and lonely (cf Jdg 13:9; Brensinger 1999:146).

Le Roux (2016:501-505, 509-512, 516, 518-519, 523) comments that according to the ‘dominant cultural ideology’ (cf Van der Merwe 2009) she is the ‘non-ideal body’ because of her gender while her husband by virtue of being male is the ideal and preferred body. Yet the wife, despite her non-ideal or ‘unwhole’ body, is the heroine in the story (Le Roux 2016:504-515), the one who ‘shows insight into situations while the ideal male body is presented as being uninformed and even foolish’ (Le Roux 2016:510; cf Bellis 1994:293; Brettler 2002:48). It is to the woman that the Angel of the Lord who, at first unbeknownst

to the husband and wife, is the Lord Himself, appears twice (Fruchtenbaum 2007:167-169). There is a hidden polemic in the text (see 2.3.3.2). The author/editor is conveying a message ('a counterculture rhetoric'; cf Van der Merwe 2009) to the readers. Despite the dominant cultural ideology YHWH values men, women, heathen and all people who do not fit into the mould of cultural perceptions of them equally. In His eyes, no one is seen as unwhole or non-ideal. Despite her 'unenviable' position as a barren woman, the Angel of the Lord proclaims her to be blessed by announcing her imminent pregnancy (Brensinger 1999:146).

The message of a promised child was brought to the woman a second time before it was delivered to the husband (Gn 18:10; Brensinger 1999:146). Knowing that, the Lord appeared only to the woman and, seemingly in a deliberate act, and not to him, the husband needed a visitation from the Angel of the Lord himself to confirm his wife's message.

It is with her, the stronger personality in the narrative, rather than the husband with whom the Angel interacted (Bellis 1994:293). The message was given with specific instructions, which would set the woman apart from the rest in her community and demonstrate her divinely appointed status (Jordan 1985:230-231; cf Brettler 2002:46-47). The woman, the non-preferred body type, had found favour with God (Le Roux 2016:501-525) and therefore she would too with her people. She, a barren woman and thus despised would give birth to a miracle child, the saviour of his people. The 'seed of the woman' would rescue her people and deliver them from their sin (Jordan 1985:230-231). This elevation of her lowly status by the Angel of the Lord would be visible and recognised by her people and she would finally come into her own right as a woman of standing among her people (Brensinger 1999:146; cf Jordan 1985:231).

Le Roux (2016) adds that it was not just because she was barren that the Lord enhanced the woman's status – the fact that He appeared to her and not her husband shows something of the Lord's heart for women. In addition, the woman convinced her husband that they would not perish (Jdg 13:23; Brensinger 1999:147). It is her spiritual insight, which is so remarkable considering 'the spiritual low in the lives of the children of Israel' (Le Roux 2016:511) that persuaded her husband that they would not die.<sup>95</sup> Instead they would become the parents of a deliverer of Israel as promised by God (Hamilton 2008:153; Wiersbe 2010:130; Fruchtenbaum 2007:171). Goldingay (2011:133) remarks that the

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<sup>95</sup> According to Jewish belief, anyone who sees God must die (Fruchtenbaum 2007:171).

woman would ‘make a marvelous mother because of her spiritual insight’ which she would use to teach her son. Her husband, on the other hand, lacked her faith and keen perception of YHWH *inter alia* as the God who will bring His promise to pass. The woman would be blessed and gain her significance in her community from the son she would give birth to according to the custom of the times (Goldingay 2011:133).

Goldingay (2011:133) believes that ‘the story’ in Judges 13 ‘stands oddly in the tension between God’s vision’ of equality between husbands and wives ‘in relation to God, society and one another and the patriarchal reality in the world whereby men count for more than women’ (Goldingay 2011:133, cf Brettler 2002:48). The wife is not named; she acquired her importance in her community through the birth of her son and her status as a wife. After her visitation by the Angel, she deferred to her husband. The husband, according to Goldingay (2011:133), was ‘locked in the patriarchal way of thinking’ because he did not seem to believe his wife and prayed that the Angel visit him. However, Bellis (1994:294) asserts that while Manoah was obtuse, the wife was discerning, intelligent and thoughtful. She observes that ‘the differences between them lie not in supposedly gender-based approaches to seeing reality but in their individual gifts or lack thereof’ (Bellis 1994:294). This idea is unlike the traditional point of view that finds the Biblical depiction of males more sympathetic than females (Brettler 2002:48) and the orthodox view of the patriarchal reality that views men as more significant than women (Goldingay 2011:133; cf Bellis 1994:294).

Consistent with this great emphasis on motherhood, an infertile woman had no ‘rights’ or involvement in the future of her society and therefore no authority (Brensinger 1999:146). She was therefore, in addition to being the non-ideal body (Le Roux 2016:501-525), not a (re)productive member of her community.

Whatever other essential contributions she may have made that might have elevated her status in society and any ‘perspicacity and intelligence’ such as that displayed by the wife in Judges 13 (Block 1999b:419), cultural norms would have insisted that she was a mother. Sarah and Rachel, in the Old Testament, went to great lengths to have children<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Sarah had substantial authority in her household, but as a childless woman she was open to the ridicule and scorn from even those of lesser status (Gn 16:4-5). Witcombe (2000) has put forth the idea that Sarah and Rebecca, in an assertion of their authority, purposefully remained childless in keeping with the custom of priestesses in their home country, Mesopotamia. According to Teubal (1984:xiv-xv) Sarah was a

(Gn 16:2, 4; 30:4). The mother of Samson equally may have gone to extremes to fall pregnant. Their behaviour becomes clear once it is understood in the context of the covenant and nation building (cf Gn 15:18-21; 17:1-9; 15; 26:3; 28:13-15) organisational (heterarchical) systems within the Hebrew household.

For that reason, a woman's ability to provide the community with children and a future assured her of a power base equivalent to that of a man. The mother of Samson had the right to name her son, which functions to emphasise her (important) role (in the narrative and the community; see Block 1999b:416). The status of the mother of Samson in Chapter 13 of Judges, where she appeared rather forlorn, was probably lower before the birth of Samson compared to her authority and decision-making power in Judges 14:2-5 (after the birth of her son). However, Bellis (1994:316) notes that the wife (even before the birth of her miracle child), along with Deborah, Jael, and Rahab, was a strong character with autonomy and who acted in a 'positive fashion'. While the theocracy was maintained, female independent behaviour, vigour and strong leadership were also revealed (such as leadership ability displayed by Deborah in Judges 4-5; Block 1999b:176, 214). Unlike the traditional view of the powerless female character in the Old Testament, the qualities mentioned above together with their faith and piety (Block 1999b:185-186) are what set the women in the pre-monarchic period apart.

### 2.6.3 Women's authority in the pre-monarchic period

According to the traditional view of patriarchy, the authority of women (in the pre-monarchic period) is negligent. Block (1999b:419) comments that 'the Samson story

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“‘priestess’...that endowed her with power of the office that went with it’. The early Hebrews left Mesopotamia and transferred into Canaan ‘a new religion and culture’. Teubal (1984:xv) compares Sarah to the *en* and *naditu* priestesses of ancient Mesopotamia. In her new religion, she retained the function and had the authority of a priestess from her previous religion.

The behaviour and concerns of Sarah, Rebecca and Rachel are therefore not ‘individual personal disagreements’ but the consequence of these matriarchs’ battle to uphold ‘certain principles over a period of three generations’ (Teubal 1984:xv). These principles might have included holding authority on religious and economic levels in their households.

I believe, however, that given the covenant in Genesis 17:1-22 YHWH had made with Abraham, it is particularly verse 15, which pertains to Sarah specifically, and by extension her female successors. YHWH had made her an indispensable part of His covenant and promise of a future people; she would not have been allowed to retain any cultic custom or rite from a previous religion. In order to uphold the covenant Sarah had to give birth to a child. It would be a child who knew and worshipped YHWH and no other god. Thus, his mother would have taught him to follow only YHWH.

represents the last of a series of cycles of apostasy-repression-appeal-deliverance in each of which.... the depravity of the nation sank to a new low'. This state, more than anything else, would account for the decrease of women's authority, autonomy and status and the abhorrent acts against some of them in Judges.

Honourable as feminist aspirations are, their traditional view of patriarchy has habitually taken precedence over examining the evidences that exist and tell the noteworthy story of the substantial amount of (household) authority held by ancient women (Meyers 1988:35, 41-45, 78-79, 139, 151, 174-175). Feminists also hold the idea that marriage and motherhood disempowered women in earlier times. However, as narrated in the Book of Judges, there is the overt depiction of Deborah's significant authority outside the domestic sphere, the apparent authority of the mother of Sisera (Jdg 5:28-30) as well as the implied (or covert) authority of Samson's mother (Jdg 13; 14) and the mother of Micah (Jdg 17:1-4) within their households. The oldest existing Jewish marriage record<sup>97</sup>, which might be an indication of the equality in marriages dating back to earlier epochs (such as the pre-monarchic period, for instance), discloses the bride to possess the same rights as her husband (Porten 2009). To declare marriage detrimental to women and their status in the Bible is erroneous. The Old Testament reveals that women could willingly enter into marriage and that their husbands were loyal to them (Gn 24:57-58; Ruth 3; 4; Jdg 13; 14; cf 2.3.4.1).<sup>98</sup> In the Book of Judges (Jdg 13; 14:2-5), the marriage of the mother of Samson to Manoah is apparently a committed union. This is even though the wife initially was sterile and might have been so for quite some time before the birth of Samson. Notwithstanding her sterility, the wife did reveal a certain authority and courage (Bellis 1994:316; Block 1999b:418-419; Brensinger 1999:147). She was able to appease her fearful husband after their encounter with the Angel of the Lord (Jdg 13:22; Brensinger

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<sup>97</sup> The bride, Mibtahiah, could own property that she could hand down or exchange without her husband's permission. She could also renounce her marriage to her husband, Jezaniah, just as he had the right to divorce her (Porten 2009). The marriage contract is one of three discovered in a collection of Aramaic papyri known as the Elephantine Papyri found on the island of Elephantine in Upper Egypt that date back to the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC. The marriage document originates from a Jewish military settlement known as Yeb. The naming of her sons by their mother Mibtahiah is one indication of the significant amount of influence held by women (Cook 1915:346-364). Women feature prominently, and they enjoyed a great amount of freedom. This is evident in large number of women's names that appear, about 36 female names are mentioned, and which included that of her father instead of her husband (Porten 2009).

<sup>98</sup> Though the marriage between Jacob and Rachel was arranged, it appears that Rachel agreed to marry Jacob, having waited seven years to marry him (cf Gn 29). Rahab (cf Jos 2) decided to live in the Israelite community and marry one of the men.

1999:147).

Achsah (Jdg 1:11-15; see 2.5.1; 5.5.2.2 a; 6.3.2 a) was neither an unwilling nor an apathetic partner in her marriage to Othniel, despite her being given as a reward to him in capturing the city of Debir (cf 5.8.2.2). Evidently, Othniel did not marry a woman who was at the height of what she could offer him in terms of economic productivity for the land that she was given as a dowry lacked water, which was indispensable to the land's fertility (Fruchtenbaum 2007:29).

Biblical texts and the Hebrew legal system can be considered from an alternate approach. Instead of looking at the Biblical narratives to ascertain androcentrism and Hebrew law to affirm male domination, scholars should examine both as a reflection of the Israelite father's ability 'to lead, protect and provide.' Seen from this point of view, women's reality takes on another meaning because in this context women are esteemed with equal standing in their families (Bradley 2003:6).

## 2.7 'HIDDEN' WOMEN'S LIVES IN THE PRE-MONARCHIC PERIOD

### 2.7.1 Introduction

In the process of history-making, the male recorders of the past have left many of women's roles and participation unrecorded. Consequently, the 'Israelite woman is largely unseen in the pages of the Hebrew Bible' (Meyers 1988:5). History remains one-sided, distorted and only half of the story (Lerner 1986:4). Consequently, the creation of a women's history necessitates a retelling or rewriting of androcentric history in order to give the complete account of humankind's past (Lerner 1986:4-5).<sup>99</sup> The construction of a history of women in the Old Testament, however, is met with a number of obstacles: firstly, the dearth of information and secondly, the idea that the history of the women in the pre-monarchic period, for instance, cannot be severed from its (what is traditionally considered to be an) oppressive patriarchal past.

### 2.7.2 Polemics of writing a history of women in the pre-monarchic period

#### 2.7.2.1 *The Bible as sole textual source*

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<sup>99</sup> Lerner (1986:4) defines history as 'the recorded and interpreted past' by men 'which dates from the invention of writing of Mesopotamia' as opposed to the 'unrecorded past' that is 'all the events of the past as recollected by human beings' which includes the participation of women in the process of history-making, but which is left largely ignored and un-interpreted by male recorders of history.



The scarcity of textual evidence designates the Bible as the primary textual source upon which to base the reconstruction of the lived reality of proto-Israelite women.<sup>100</sup> Feminist scholars have struggled to present a true and accurate narrative since the Biblical texts are void of adequate information related to women and their daily reality in Biblical times. Their task has been made more demanding by the androcentric orientation of the Bible authors. This creates a dilemma for Meyers, who avers that since the Bible was authored within the social contexts of patriarchy, ordinary women are nonexistent in the Biblical texts (Meyers 2013:3).<sup>101</sup> New approaches in methodologies, it seemed, are the understandable answer to reconstruct the lives of the pre-monarchic Israelite women. Meyers believes that an interdisciplinary methodology (cf 1.6.1) would serve to uncover these lives. However, for Trible, the ordinary woman's story can be told if she is successfully removed from the patriarchal sphere/parameters and concomitant prejudices against women in the Bible (Trible 1973:30-48).

#### 2.7.2.2 *'Liberating' the Bible from patriarchy*

Frymer-Kensky confirms Trible's method as 'liberating biblical text from its patriarchal overlay' by means of 'depatriarchalizing' (Trible 1973:30-48; Frymer-Kensky 2006:167). Trible, attempting to sidestep the chauvinist constructs inherent in the texts of the Biblical narratives, offers to reread the Bible by analysing the Hebrew concepts of YHWH<sup>102</sup> – one of the Biblical topics that she believes 'disavow (reject) sexism' ([insertion mine], Trible 1973:31). In other words, by emphasising the female attributes of YHWH instead of the

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<sup>100</sup>According to Ackerman (2003:174-175), the lack of an ancient (female) observer of the lived experiences of women makes it difficult to gather an understanding of women's lives and experiences in Biblical times. The Biblical narratives that deal with women and which remain the primary text for accounts of women's lives were written by patriarchal men and they, in addition to a few of the most important early Israelite written texts namely the Tell Arad ostraca (6<sup>th</sup> century BC), the Lachish Letters and the Samaria ostraca, relate to military or trade and business activities.

The Bible does not accurately reflect the concerns of the ordinary women. Furthermore, reports Ackerman, men also authored extra-biblical texts that deal with ancient Near Eastern women. Consequently, comparative studies of women's lives are seen from a male perspective.

<sup>101</sup> Meyers distinguishes between Biblical women and Israelite woman and notes that women in the Bible are exceptional women whose lives do not represent those of ordinary Israelite women (Meyers 1988:5; 2013:3-4, 14). However, one can argue that in the roles of an exceptional woman such as Deborah in the Book of Judges, the reality of the ordinary can also be found. Deborah is described not only as a judge and prophetess of Israel, but also a mother and wife (Jdg 4-5).

<sup>102</sup> Trible sees YHWH as a 'deity above sexuality' (Trible 1973:73). Therefore, in the gender-neutrality of God, the reader can view the woman in the Bible as distinct from patriarchy and ascribe to her value and significance that the male Bible author does not.

patriarchal setting of events in the Old Testament, women's stories and their authority might be freed from male bias and in this way recovered. Consequently, Tribble proposes several themes to the translation of Biblical texts that would liberate them of sexism. To explore the theme of Israel's theological perceptions of YHWH means that He is the God with both male and female attributes. Female imagery of YHWH includes providing food and drink to the wandering Israelites in the desert. These are women's roles (Tribble 1973:31-32).<sup>103</sup> In addition, a second theme involves women as liberators of the 'children of Israel' (Ex 1:15; 2-10; Ex 1:16, 22) that could assist in the elimination of patriarchy. A third theme that 'disavows sexism' contains 'corporate personality'. Tribble comments that unity characterises the bond between men and women. 'The oppression of one individual or one group is the oppression of all individuals and all groups' (Tribble 1973:34-35).

Nevertheless, criticising Tribble's literary-critical applications to the Old Testament texts, Ackerman maintains that women cannot be removed from the patriarchal system dominant in their society. Instead, a historical method, to collect as much information about women's real-life experiences as possible from the little information provided in the Bible, would be more appropriate (Ackerman 2003:172). Both Exum and Fuchs as literary critics concur that women in the Bible operated within the patriarchal environment. Women's support of the welfare of the male was the primary factor that decided their actions (Fuchs 1985:117-136; Exum 1994). According to Fuchs and Exum, it would be a futile endeavour to examine women's lives as distinct from the patriarchal paradigm.

Meyers does not criticise the literary and historical critical methods applied by feminist scholars to interpreting the biblical text. However, to discover the real Israelite women concealed by these narratives, Meyers proposes the application of social and anthropological principles to the stories. This is to gain (an improved) understanding of 'gender roles and dynamics of ordinary Israelites'. In addition, to provide a more all-inclusive portrait of women's lives, archaeological data gathered from ancient Israelite households should be employed to gain a clearer picture of these hidden women's reality. Extra-biblical material should also be taken into consideration. Among these resources are early Near Eastern texts, which provide a source for analogous studies to make up for the

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<sup>103</sup>Tribble (1973:31-33) discusses various female roles ascribed to YHWH.

lack of information regarding women in the Bible<sup>104</sup> (Ackerman 2003:174; Meyers 2013:5, 7, 27; cf Bird 1974:41-88; 1999:3-20). In light of these viewpoints, the following segment will deal with a construction of the history of the women in the pre-monarchic period in terms of the variant form of patriarchy in operation at that time. It is my opinion that such a ‘women’s history’ will highlight women’s authority and autonomy within a benevolent form of male rule.

### **2.7.3 Constructing a ‘women’s history’**

Male rule in the pre-monarchic tribal community displays a paradoxical and curious nature that is difficult to define (cf Jdg 1:14-15; 4; 5; 9:53; 13 and 14:2-5; 17:1-4 vs Jdg 19-21:12-13, 20-23; cf 2.4.1.1 a, b, c). Meyers (2014:8-27) asserts that traditional views of patriarchy cannot be descriptive of male rule in the pre-monarchic era. The best designation is patrimonialism manifested in a benevolent form (Meyers 1988:187; cf 2.4.1.1; 2.4.1.2 a; 2.4.1.3) during YHWH’s theocratic rule. Consequently, the lives of women under the benevolent patrimonial rule in the theocracy of the pre-monarchic tribal community, therefore, would have allowed them certain authority and autonomy that went with their religious ideologies. Ackerman (2003:172) believes that the lives of women cannot be separated from Biblical patriarchy. Consequently, if the patriarchal system occurred in a beneficial form under theocratic rule with heterarchical systems in place in the household, in my opinion, it then follows that women benefitted along with men and shared in the ‘gender mutuality and interdependence, and of concomitant female power’ within this system (Meyers 1988:187).

There are indications in the Book of Judges that pre-monarchic women lived within the parameters of benevolent rule of the father in which their authority and autonomy was assured (cf Jdg 1:14-15; 4; 5; 13; 14:2-5; 17:1-4). Certain socio-economic and religious factors also defined and supported a singular form of patriarchy with features unique to that period.

In view of this, reconstructing the history of the proto-Israelite women in the pre-

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<sup>104</sup> Men authored these texts as well. What is needed is a ‘direct’ (female) witness’ of that period who could give an accurate account of women’s reality ([insertion mine], Ackerman 2003:174). The male witnesses and authors appear to view women in terms of their importance and women’s relevance to men (Ackerman 2003:174).

monarchic period requires a divergence from the traditional interpretive model of male rule. There has been an excessive amount of concentration (and rightly so) on the negative effects of patriarchy. This intense focus, however, detracts from an actual recovery of the lived reality of the women in the pre-monarchic period. How are we to recover the hidden lives of the young women of Jabesh Gilead and Shiloh (Jdg 21:12-13, 23), for example, if all the attention is on abusive patriarchy that, according to the traditional model, led to their capture and forcible marriages? What shape did the lives of these young women take after their marriages? We are aware from history that the Benjamites survived near extinction. Since women are ‘essential and central to creating society’ (Lerner 1986:5), it becomes apparent that the young women of Jabesh Gilead and Shiloh (after their forced marriages) were integral to the continued existence of the Benjamites. It can be assumed that as soon as YHWH’s covenantal rule was put in place and the covenants remembered (cf 2.3.3; 4.3.1), the women could have overcome their ordeal and acquired authority and status as mothers and wives according to societal standards. We may understand that the young women, traumatised and forced to live with their new Benjamite husbands (cf Block 1999b:516) and thus compelled to be wives and mothers, would somehow have gathered their strength to manage and supervise the domestic processes within their agrarian households. They had suffered a terrifying ordeal, but the young women would gain control of their lives again and decide the outcome of their story. Clarke (1832d) comments that:

... the Benjamites acted in the most honorable way by the young women whom they had thus violently carried off and we may rest assured they took them to an inheritance at least equal to their own, for it does not appear that any part of the lands of the Benjamites was alienated from them, and the six hundred men in question shared, for the present, the inheritance of many thousands.

The narrative in Judges 21 embodies the catastrophic decisions of the pre-monarchic tribal community to recognise the authority of YHWH in their actions (Constable 2017:154). Constable (2017:155) observes that a failure on behalf of individuals to violate the law of God resulted in the moral downfall of an entire people.

Consequently, it is within this context, that is the deterioration of the values and the ethos of equality in the theocracy, that the suffering and abuse of the girls of Shiloh and Jabesh Gilead should be considered.

Motherhood gave women a certain authority and autonomy and was intrinsically bound to women’s self-understanding. Consequently, we may imagine that since the

responsibilities of women were considered equivalent to those of men, the young women of Jabesh Gilead and Shiloh became powerful mothers who were formidable teachers, notably influencing the development, training and instruction of their children and subsequent generations (cf Chapter Five; Hilton & Hilton 2009).

Motherhood is a cohesive theme among the women in the Book of Judges in which the stories of mothers of Sisera, Samson and Micah are narrated. Deborah, apart from being a judge and ruler of Israel, is also credited with the title of mother (of Israel). Achsah's status as wife and future mother was probably taken into consideration when her father granted her request in Judges 1:14. In contrast, the daughter of Jephthah in Judges 11:38 bemoaned her death<sup>105</sup> because she would never be a wife or mother and thus gain the respect of her community, possibly forfeited by her grandmother's position as a harlot in Judges 11:1. Thus, to reconstruct a history of the women in the pre-monarchic era, women's roles as mothers<sup>106</sup> need to be considered and in addition other specific areas.

#### *2.7.3.1 Areas of focus in the construction of a 'women's history'*

In my opinion, in the reconstruction of a women's history in the pre-monarchic era, research and archaeological applications need to focus on:

- Firstly, the benevolent form of male rule during the theocracy of YHWH together with its attendant covenantal laws, operational in the pre-monarchic period (cf 2.3.3; 4.3.1; Meyers 2014:8-27; see also 2002a:35-45; 2002b:14-44 in which the authority of women, not possible within malevolent patriarchy, is described; cf Block 1999b;<sup>107</sup> Ebeling 2010:147).

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<sup>105</sup> As mentioned before, I believe that Jephthah did sacrifice his daughter to honour the injudicious oath he had made in Judges 11:30 and so to save himself from public disgrace (see 2.4.1.1 e). He is but one of several men in the Book of Judges who seemed to show a certain corruption in their belief system and, according to Block (1999b:542-543), a deviant form of patriarchy (see 2.4.1.1), while women such as Deborah and Manoah's wife showed faith and were devoted to the Lord of the Covenant.

<sup>106</sup> Tanner (2005) observes that '...for some time it has not been vogue for women to extol the virtues of motherhood or for young women to express the desires of their hearts to be mothers'. Based on this statement by Tanner (2005), Hilton and Hilton (2009) remark that 'Old Testament matriarchs reach across the centuries to affirm the value of motherhood. Their sacrifices altered the course of human history. As we read of mothers in the Old Testament and throughout the scriptures, we should contemplate the sacrifices they made. Their lives testify to us of the importance of posterity and the vital role mothers play in shaping the future of the world'.

<sup>107</sup> The Biblical standard of male leadership included the wish of God that men in authority see themselves as servants to those under them, sacrificing their own well-being for the welfare of their families and neighbours (Block 1999b:543, 584).

- Secondly, a re-evaluation of concepts and the statuses of wife and mother that are seen as unimportant and ordinary in modern times, but which provided women in the Bible influential status on par with male authority (cf Hilton & Hilton 2009).
- Thirdly, women's religious and economic activities within their households need to be another essential focus in understanding and formulating a women's specific history of that era. Researchers need to go where women's authority could function at optimum levels and that would be within the domestic domain (see Chapters Four and Five; Meyers 2002b:14-44; 1997a:1-47; 2014:8-27; cf Ackerman 2003:174-183).
- The religious ideologies of the Israelites, particularly concerning Genesis 1:28; 2:18; 17:15 of which they probably were cognisant. Instead of an oppressive religious patriarchy, in these texts there might be roots of women's roles and status and concomitant authority and independence as depicted in the Book of Judges.

#### *2.7.3.2 The domestic economy: the base of the early agrarian community*

Meyers (1998:256) notes that recent research about the lived experiences of the pre-monarchic women reveals that their participation in multiple tasks granted women a great deal of authority equal to that of male power (cf Chapter Five). A great number of their economic duties was performed within their households. Some tasks demanded their involvement in land and property. These and similar duties expanded their domestic tasks into the wider community and led to greater mobility for women (cf Jdg 1:14-15; 4-5; 13:9). A women's specific history should include the women's roles as wives and mothers and by extension daughters within their household.

These roles were of the utmost importance to the continued survival of households and communities. Within their roles as wives, mothers and daughters, women fulfilled and managed the domestic activities of their households. A reconstruction of women's history therefore should look at how women functioned within their households.<sup>108</sup> In my opinion,

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<sup>108</sup> Meyers (1988:61) observes that women were involved in the hard labour of domestic productive and reproductive activity. Women also assisted in recreating the landscape of the highlands (clearing the land of trees and rocks) to help ease farming activities. Although composed after the pre-monarchic era, Proverbs 31 mentions the myriad of undertakings women participated in. They were involved in the acquisition of property (cf Jdg 1:14-15), farming (Jdg 13:9) and trade (cf Proverbs 31:16; 18; cf 5.5.1). The distribution of farming produce (wine) and the trade of cloth would have taken place in market areas in the community. King and Stager (2001:191-192) note that some of these market places, where women would have

such a research will most probably result in the negation of an oppressive patriarchal system as a social organisation operative in the pre-monarchic era.

## 2.8 CONCLUSION

The proposition that patriarchy ‘always existed’ (Marler 2006) as an abusive and oppressive social structure cannot be confirmed. It is my opinion that women’s authority and egalitarian values make their appearance in the pre-monarchic era as evinced by Achsah (Jdg 1:11-15), Deborah and Jael (Jdg 4-5), the mothers of Samson and Micah (Jdg 13 and 14; 17: 1-5), and Delilah (Jdg 16).

The unique environment and life in the Hill Country (see Chapter Three) as well as the kingship of YHWH attributed to the practice of female authority. In general, women enjoyed as many of the rights as the men did if the people maintained their devotion to YHWH. However, whenever the people wandered away from worshipping YHWH, this had dire effects on the lives of the pre-monarchic women and the communities experienced a concomitant decrease in women’s authority (cf Jdg 19-21).

Traditional views of (malevolent) patriarchy are still held despite evidence that

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participated in the commercial enterprises, were uncovered in the city of Ashkelon (most probably Canaanite or Philistine women) mentioned in Judges 1:18. Ashkelon was taken over by the tribe of Judah (Jdg 1:18) and most probably the ‘streets’, better translated as bazaars mentioned in 2 Samuel 1:20, were inherited from the early Iron Age I inhabitants of Ashkelon. The authors mention that Stager’s investigation revealed a wine shop and a butcher shop (King & Stager 2001:191).

The wine shop and butcher shop made up several shops that bordered the street excavated by Stager and his team. The wine shop contained ‘dipper juglets and wine jars’ and the butcher shop ‘cuts of meat’ (King & Stager 2001:191). Women would have brought their commodities produced in their households there to sell or barter. Stopovers in cities en route during pilgrimages to Shiloh, for example, would have given women or their husbands and other male family members an opportunity to boost the household’s economy by inter alia selling/bartering articles of clothing and other textiles, for example, made by the women.

Meyers (1998:256) notes that women’s participation in a multitude of tasks would have granted them a great deal of authority that was on the same level of equality as that of men. The multiplicity of tasks, food preparation and storage, grinding of flour and bread-making activities, textile production and reproductive activities needed careful supervision, planning and execution (Meyers 1997a:1-47; 1998:251-262; 1999a:33-44; cf McNutt 1999:95-96). These activities naturally occurred in their houses or courtyards where groups of women organised themselves, tasks were delegated, and it was ensured that every woman accomplished her assigned duty. It is most probable that women established a heterarchical system (cf 1.1.5; 2.2.2.1; 5.1.1; 5.3.2; 6.3.3.1b; Footnote 20, 57) in which the elder women with the knowledge and expertise acted as group managers, supervisors and instructors of the younger women (Meyers 2006:245-254).

A women’s history therefore should look beyond the violence perpetrated against some women in the Book of Judges and use these as examples of oppressive patriarchy. It should focus on women’s independence and authority as well as decision-making power within their households (cf Jdg 1:14-15; 14:2-5; 17:1-4). More about women’s domestic activities in the pre-monarchic era will be revealed in Chapter Five.

indicate that women in the tribal communities had roles and status that allowed them concomitant autonomy and authority (Ebeling 2010:147). The characters of Deborah, Achsah, Jael, the unnamed woman of Thebez, the daughter of Jephthah, mothers of Samson and Micah, Delilah and the concubine of the Levite display independent behaviour that contradicts traditional interpretations of Biblical patriarchy. It is therefore evident that a different form of patriarchal rule within the social organisation (of the tribal community) was operative in the pre-monarchic era. The problem is how to label this system of governance.

I believe that the social organisation of the pre-monarchic tribal community was arranged along a theocratic rule of YHWH in which both men and women could prosper and enjoy equal status, albeit in different roles. Theocracy allowed women to assume leadership positions in the public sphere at times, which was condoned and encouraged by benevolent patriarchy under the standards of theocratic rule. Within their households organised in heterarchical systems, women could achieve high status and authority through their roles as mothers, nurturers and teachers of their children.

I do not deny the horrible acts of violence against women in the Book of Judges and that women could be oppressed and abused in the patriarchal system. However, instead of focusing only on rape and forcible marriages of the young women in Judges 21:12; 23 for example, we could attempt to also understand their roles and status afterwards.

The young women might have been reluctant to take up their new roles in the community since it was not their choice initially. However, through motherhood the young women became the builders and preservers of a nation. Perhaps the women became attentive to the injustices committed against them and of the desecration of their rights. They might have been aware of the importance of establishing justice within an ethical and lawful society that would be bound to the serious penalties of breaking the law (see Block 1999b; Constable 2017:154). As mothers, the women would have the vital responsibility of securing a future for their households and the community in a productive and reproductive capacity (Meade 1998:7, 9-12, 14-15). Thus, they might have attempted to reestablish the values and ideals of covenant commitment and existence (Block 1999b; Hilton & Hilton 2009).

The crimes against the women in Judges 19 and 21 should also be considered in



light of the special relationship (or the breaking of it) that the people had with YHWH. Brensinger (1999:192) states that the violence perpetrated against the women in Judges 19 and 21 is a result of the ‘apostasy and degradation of religious practices’ recorded in Judges 17-18. It is the breaking of the covenant, in which they needed to serve the Lord as King and which would have benefitted the people including the position of women in the society, that causes the ‘perversion of hospitality, sexual immorality, murder and mass abduction and the near annihilation of an entire tribe’ (cf Jdg 20:46-48; Brensinger 1999:192). Le Roux (2015:510-519) points out that in the benevolent approach of Caleb towards Achsah (Jdg 14-15), we are shown the respect, kindness and equality in the treatment of women in the Book of Judges in general.

I think as women of faith in a righteous God who promises honour, justice, peace and equality to all, women who read the Bible have endless opportunity to create and recreate their lives according to these divine principles (of virtue, justice, peace and equality). Feminists often forget the salient fact that the women in the Bible exhibited actions, inexplicable as they may appear to us in modern times, that went with their faith in God. As I indicated above, instead of seeing their lives as depictions of only terror as in the case of the concubine of the Levite and the women of Jabesh Gilead and Shiloh, we should attempt to uncover the women behind these acts of violence. The aforementioned women probably had faith in God that provided them with hope and endurance. It is my belief that we will find similar stories of success in modern times, within each woman who has suffered pain and devaluation at the hand of a male and who has survived to tell her story. The women that emerge when feminist and traditional patriarchal constructs are removed are perceptive, courageous, independent, authoritative, leaders, mothers, wives, helpers and (in the case of Deborah and the mother of Samson) devoted to YHWH. It is particularly under YHWH’s covenantal rule that women excel.

A reconstruction of a ‘women’s history’ therefore should, alongside the abovementioned ideas, emphasise those areas in which the ordinary women held much authority such as their households. It is within their households that women had authority concomitant to that of men. It is very probable that patriarchal rule in the household and the community was benevolent. Highlighting women’s economic and religious activities within the domestic context will give a more accurate account of the lived reality of the

pre-monarchic women. The impact of patriarchy was positive rather than negative and allowed women to achieve positions of status and authority within their households and the wider community.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **GENDER RELATIONS IN THE PRE-MONARCHIC ERA**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

In the previous chapter, I presented a discussion of women's roles and status in the patriarchal community of pre-monarchic Israel. I have argued that women had significant status and important roles in the pre-monarchic period (see Abraham 2002:161). I have supported the view that women's status and roles occurred within a benevolent patriarchal system in the pre-monarchic era.

In this chapter, I will expand the discussion of women's status, roles and concomitant authority in pre-monarchic Israel. An important aim in this chapter, therefore, is to investigate the relationship between the two gender groups in early Israel. I will attempt to understanding how the balance of power between men and women operated and to what extent its function allowed women significant status and roles. For this reason, gender equality will be an important part of the discussion in this chapter. I will investigate the influences that had a remarkable impact on gender relations. I will discuss theoretical frameworks (which are almost always Marxist in nature) that helped shaped feminist thought regarding imbalanced gender equality. I will endeavour to launch a few refutations against the negative images of women and their subjugation by the rule of men as thought of by feminists and mainstream academia. Then, to support these repudiations, I will discuss possible elements that had a beneficial effect on relations between women and men in the pre-monarchic period of Israel.

##### **3.1.1 Mutual coexistence**

To understand the extent to which women's status and the authority associated with their roles in the community were possible, one has to consider various dynamics that impacted on women's status and roles in their households and communities. Davidson (1988:8) asserted that 'the full meaning of human existence is not in male or female isolation, but in their mutual communication'.

Therefore, I believe that shared communication between men and women has largely been viewed throughout the ages in terms of the balance of power extant in the relationship between the two genders. Scott (1986:1054) remarks that this is one

method of analysing the ‘sex roles and sexual symbolism’ in the gender groups. The power balance between men and women, therefore, might be one element that could assist in determining the degree to which women’s status and equality was possible and extant in the pre-monarchic period. In my opinion, the dominant cultural ideology (that is patriarchy) as well as the theocratic social arrangement of the pre-monarchic period affected the balance of power between men and women in that era.<sup>109</sup> Following this, I will look at a discussion of the balance of power between the gender groups and how gender relations were influenced by fluctuating societal contexts within the pre-monarchic period.

### **3.1.2 The delicate balance between pre-monarchic men and women**

Historically, the complexities of the power dynamic between men and women have always made it a delicate balance to maintain.<sup>110</sup> Evidence of this delicateness is visible in the story of Achsah in Judges 1:14-15 (see 2.5.1; 5.2.2.1a; 6.3.2a), in the story of Samson and Delilah in Judges 16:1-21 (see Chapter six), in the relationship between mother and son in Judges 17:1-4 (cf 4.3.5), and between the concubine and her Levite in Judges 19 (see 6.3.2 a-e; 6.3.4.1-6.3.4.3). Historically, trends of gender<sup>111</sup> interactions within ancient families and the broader society (Scott 1986:1053-1075)

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<sup>109</sup> In Chapter Two, I held the premise that the dominant cultural ideology could be abusive towards women but due to YHWH’s covenantal rule in general it was beneficial to women – it provided women equal opportunities, roles and status with the men in their community.

<sup>110</sup> It came to be believed that the reality of women is such that male domination has tilted the equilibrium of power away from parity (Millet 1970:ix-xvii; Peplau & Campbell 1989:121). Over a century ago, Christian feminist Grimke (1838:7) wrote that men and women have been involved in a ‘struggle for dominion’. Grimke (1838:10) held that this power struggle had been ongoing for (over) six thousand years, almost since the beginning of their relationship. This struggle, according to Genesis, occurred at the dawn of creation (Grimke 1838:7, 10).

Although God declared both the man and the woman as earth’s rulers in Genesis, conflicts (of power) erupted between the genders in subsequent generations. Although the man and the woman would be equal in nature, leadership and authority, the balance of power apparently favoured the male. In the Western world, women have equal opportunities for access to positional leadership and other roles in the workplace. However, in Western society, gender role differentiation is still firmly in place in the family structure (girls are taught to be ‘feminine’ – submissive – and boys to be strong and assertive). As a result, gender inequality persists within families (Jackson 1998:249-252) as well as in the workplace (Reskin 2000:319; cf Ridgeway 2006:265-266).

<sup>111</sup> The term ‘gender’ was adopted by American feminists to distinguish it from words such as ‘sex’ and ‘sexual difference’ for ‘the biological determinism implicit’ in their usage. ‘Gender’ also included the ‘relational aspect of normative definitions of femininity’ and thus ‘men and women were defined in terms of each other’. The inclusivity of the use of gender meant that the history of both men and women became the focus of investigations into the importance of the two genders in the historical past. Gender History, therefore, is discovering ‘the range in sex roles and in sexual symbolism in different societies and periods to understand their meaning’ and ‘how they functioned to maintain the social order or to promote its change’ (Davis 1976:90; Scott 1986:1054).

have undergone numerous fluctuations in the collaborations among gender groups.<sup>112</sup>

In the pre-monarchic era for instance, shifting societal contexts within that period influenced women and men (in the same population group) in different ways. Some feminists agree that gender imbalances – male dominance and female subjugation – seem to correspond with certain advances and transformations in their society and familial structures. This notion holds true, particularly in the period of the Judges, in the difference in male attitude towards women mainly in Judges 11; 19 and 21, but also in the rest of the narratives (Jdg 1; 4; 5; 13; 14; 16 and 17) in which women make their appearance.<sup>113</sup> Although feminist theory believes that gender inequality was evident in the pre-monarchic period of the Israelite communities, they do concede that it was more pronounced in the latter part of their history; in Iron Age II, for example.

Apparently, it is under YHWH's loving rule that women were not regarded as weak but as strong and heroic as their men-folk (cf Jdg 4-5). YHWH's Kingship was favourably disposed towards women. The agrarian lifestyle of the pre-monarchic community was heavily reliant on women's tasks, skills and abilities. However, because of the turbulence and frequent wars (see 2.3) of that time as well as the corruption and violation of YHWH's laws and covenant (see 2.3.3; 4.3.1), communities were frequently experiencing social and religious transformations. These societal shifts often meant a downshift in women's status and devaluation of women's roles, while men could maintain their power and authority (often at the expense of women – cf Jdg 11:34-39; 19-21). Different forms of male rule (see 2.4.1.1 a, b, c, d) also meant different levels of authority for women (see Chapter Two).

The balance of power between men and women also underwent significant alterations from one historical period to the next, for example from the pre-monarchic era to those in subsequent times.

Analogous to this are the differences in woman's status and authority in various periods in ancient Egypt. Egyptian documents, for example, reveal the varying status of women from one historical period to the next.<sup>114</sup> In the Old Kingdom, the wife is her

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<sup>112</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> century AD Israelites belonging to the rabbinic tradition, for example, had a low opinion of women (Yen 2003) in contrast to societal regard for women such as Deborah in Iron Age I (Meyers 1978:91-103).

<sup>113</sup> I also believe that gender relations in terms of power imbalances and inequality within the (Israelite) male-female bond are not only relative to the political and social system, but also to the religious structures that were the direct outflow of (hostile to women) patriarchal societies of the Canaanite nations adopted by the pre-monarchic Israelite community and their backsliding ways.

<sup>114</sup> Egyptian textual evidence (from the Old Kingdom Text – Ptahhoteps' Teaching (2500-2800 BC) to The New Kingdom text – the 'Teachings of Ani' – 1100-1900 BC to the Teaching of Ankh-Sheshonk in

husband's equal partner in a mutually balanced relationship in which psychological harmony is maintained between two independent personalities (Banschikova 2006:108). In the New Kingdom, the wife (and her husband) is needed mainly to secure domestic wealth; and in the Late Period the woman's personality disintegrates along with the partial breakdown of Egyptian society and its values (Banschikova 2006:108).

Similarly, history has mapped a corresponding course of events for women's experiences, function and status in the pre-monarchic period. Hints at gender equality<sup>115</sup> and female authority can be gleaned from the Old Testament narratives. Gender equality appears overtly there in the religious ideology of the people in the Book of Genesis (cf Gn 1:28; 2:18; 17:15). Women's authority, autonomy and initiative reached unprecedented heights in the pre-monarchic era (Jdg 1:14-15; 4-5; 9:53; 13-14; 17:1-5). This is particularly true under YHWH's rule, as mentioned above.

The authority of Deborah is but one example of women's authority that was concomitant to that of a man. Mutual decision-making, consent and harmony existed between Achsah and Othniel, Achsah and her father (Jdg 1:14-15), the parents of Samson (Jdg 13 and 14), as well as Micah and his mother (Jdg 17:1-4).

Parallel to the disintegration of the ancient Egyptian society in the Late Period, the Israelite women were denied their status and concomitant authority (especially during the monarchy). Women's rights to equality and respect, safety and provision were denied as their status almost spiralled to an end in Judges (Jdg 19-21) within a morally corrupt and deficient theocracy (see Block 1999b; Constable 2017:154).

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the Late Period ca 4<sup>th</sup> century) reveal from the perspective of gender history a steady evolution (and degradation) of the roles and impressions of a woman. This situation occurs from the Old Kingdom idea of a wife as the 'second power' in the marriage to the New Kingdom notion of the wife as the 'family co-manager', to the Late Period of the woman as 'bad and corrupted' (Banschikova 2006:108).

<sup>115</sup> Gender equality is defined as the understanding that equal treatment is the right of all people and that no-one should be discriminated against based on their gender (Gender Equality 2016. Cambridge Dictionary. From: <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/gender-equality>). In light of this definition, let us consider the next statement. Moghadam (2007:501) comments that women are the transferees of the 'group's values' to the ensuing generation. They are also the 'symbols of the group's identity' (Moghadam 2007:501). From these statements, we may deduce that the women in the pre-monarchic age, valued by the community in their roles as mothers and wives, would transmit this identity and its associated authority to their daughters and granddaughters.

Gender equality, therefore, could have been practically applied in the community based on the principles in the *ezer-kenegdo* relationship between pre-monarchic men and women (cf Jdg 1:14-15; 4-5; 14:2-5; 17:1-4). For the ancient settler men and women to survive on the Hill Country, gender mutuality and equality (an *ezer-kenegdo* relationship such as that described in Genesis 2:18) was essential (see Footnote 57; 2.3.3.1). I believe that it is precisely because of the precarious nature of their existence in the Hill Country (Meyers 1988:53-56; cf McNutt 1999:72-74; Faust & Bunimovitz 2014:152) that the *ezer-kenegdo* type of gender- relations could have been in place (see 2.3.3.1).

### 3.1.3 Gender inequality

Despite the idea that women had status and occupied authoritative roles in the pre-monarchic community and household (particularly when YHWH's theocracy was accepted – see Chapter Two), perceptions of women as oppressed and submissive (by feminist scholars) remain (see Ebeling 2010:147). Meyers finds the cause of this thought pattern to be the feminist belief in the patriarchal model developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The 19<sup>th</sup> century patriarchal paradigm (in private spheres, in families for example) was extended ‘to refer to society-wide male dominance’. Weber (1947) promoted this expansion of patriarchy (including the world of the Bible) and it is his ‘... influence on biblical studies that endures to this day’ (Meyers 2014:9, 13; cf Weber 1968).

Accordingly, Meyers has criticised the ‘Marxist-oriented framework’ that underlines these definitions (of patriarchy). In addition, Meyers has critiqued the Marxist perspective that methods of production in a particular society are directly connected to ranked societal arrangements in which forms of power and domination are demonstrated in gender and social classes (Meyers 1988:28; cf Meyers 2014:8-27; cf 3.1.3.1; 3.1.3.2). In other words, the dominant males of the patriarchal system always oppress and exploit women despite their economic contributions in their communities.

Meyers also opposes the pervasive influences of Biblical theorists Max Weber, Martin Noth and Norman Gottwald who propose the absolute rule of the father and the (adversarial) patriarchal nature of the Israelite family and wider society. Meyers (2014:8-27) declares the application of this model to the system of rule and governance in the Bible as invalid. She bases her findings on inter alia the idea that ‘different areas of household life cannot be lumped together’ because ‘male rule in one area does not necessarily mean male rule in another area’ (Meyers 2014:16). In other words, as the direct opposite of the *bêt āb* (house of the father), the *bêt ĕm* (house of the mother [often an overlooked component in the household]) had an equivalent and unifying power in the household overall (cf Jdg 14:2-5; 17:2-5).

Consequently, as mentioned above and in Chapter Two, I believe that instead of a hierarchical and antagonistic patriarchal social organisation in the pre-monarchic period, generally a heterarchical and benevolent form of patriarchy existed whenever the proto- Israelites followed YHWH.

Meyers’ discussions of ancient Israelite female status and authority have come under heavy criticism from Fuchs who describes her references to women’s power as

rather nebulous. She faults Meyers on not stating firstly, ‘over whom or in relation to what’ this power was allegedly exercised, secondly, the practices that were affected by this power and thirdly, the situations that allowed this power ‘to come into visible expression’ (Fuchs 2005:219).

Refuting the term patriarchy as an appropriate description of rule in the Iron Age I, Meyers (2014:8-27) makes it clear that rather than projecting their power over anyone, women shared it alongside men in their households (Meyers 2014:8-27). The women of the household, instead of exercising power over anyone in their households, shared it with their husbands and sons and probably daughters as well (cf Jdg 14:1-3; 17:1-4; see 2.2.2.1; 3.1.3.2 c; 4.3.4.1; 4.3.7.5; 5.1.1; 5.3.2; 6.3.3.1 b). Meyers has previously discussed the agrarian Israelite society in which the household economy was the basic unit of production. Women held control over the domestic processes such as bread making and could thus acquire the type of power that comes from these roles within their household. Men had control over male-specific tasks and gained power in that sphere (Meyers 2002b:14-44).

Consequently, the balance of power was equal between pre-monarchic men and women. Gender mutuality and interdependence occurred within the framework of ‘the decentralized and difficult village life of pre-monarchic Israel’ (Meyers 1988:187).

The pre-monarchic men and women held power concomitant to their status and roles that went with their specific tasks. These roles and statuses were as vital as much as they were brought about by certain elements (the harsh climate and environment, and the requirements for labour, for example) in the Hill Country. Women were needed to produce and reproduce. With these women’s roles of production and reproduction came significant status as well as associated authority and power that men could never obtain within the households. Accordingly, women’s authority in the household was as important as male power in public (Meyers 2002b:14-44).<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Meyers provides support for gender equality in early Israel from an (albeit later in history) agricultural Sicilian community. In the Sicilian village, the female population was essentially completely cut off from public life. But, says Meyers: ‘the extreme gender segregation visible to external observers did not mean that men had all the power and that women were passive and subservient or felt exploited. On the contrary, a complex situation of female participation in and even control over vital aspects of group life could be identified. The researcher, in trying to explain the disjunction between overt value systems and actual practice, suggests that the extraordinary requirements of agriculture on the largely barren and dry island is at the root of the subsystem of female activity. In other words, female behavior in this case is adaptive to the circumstances present in the constellation of physical environment, traditional culture, and social patterns’ (Meyers 1988:31).



### 3.1.3.1 *The 'rise of class society' and the oppression of women*

The idea that oppression of women began with the 'rise of class society' was postulated by Marx and Engels (Smith, S 1997). Engels developed this theory<sup>117</sup> based on the anthropologist Morgan's model of the progression of human society.<sup>118</sup> At the heart of the theory are the first families, the 'first form of social relationship' (which gave birth to the ruling classes).<sup>119</sup> In essence, Engels believes that the division of labour began in

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<sup>117</sup> Engels states that the advent of class society led to the dual development of the state, which embodied the welfare of the ruling classes. Excluded was the rest of society. The result was the emergence of a daily class struggle and the 'rise of the family' by which the initial ruling classes 'possessed and passed on private wealth and property' (Smith, S 1997).

<sup>118</sup> The 19<sup>th</sup> century anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan concluded that human society progressed through consecutive phases. He founded his theory on the detection of egalitarian societies and female authority within Native American tribes. Later anthropological evidence tended to agree with Morgan (Draper 1970:20-29). Morgan created his idea of progressive societal organisation based on the development of successive economic systems (Engels 2010:10) or the evolution of interdependent societal and economic organisations. These views have had far-reaching consequences. Marxist concepts, under the considerable influence of Morgan's theory have played a substantial role in the examination of gender interactions in ancient and modern societies.

<sup>119</sup> To connect women's disposessions in later technologically advanced cultures with more complex social organisations with (alleged) discrepancies in earlier societies may be misguided. Lerner (1986:35) asserts that practices of gender equality vanished with the disappearance of the Natufian societies such as Çatal Hüyük.

Differing lifestyles and approaches averse to women as well as a ruling elite structure which originated in earlier, 'simpler' societies took hold firmly in the newly formed city centres (Lerner 1986:35). The gender division of labour that started in Palaeolithic societies and which is traditionally seen as unequal and discriminatory in the assigning of tasks was continued in the later urbanised population groups. From nascent male dominance in the first unstructured and voluntary societies came total patriarchy in structured societies.

Male authorities passed laws and (enforced) regulations that changed the socio-economic and juridical world of women (Lerner 1986:7, 47). In earlier times, the nomadic hunter-gathering lifestyle diffused the violent and aggressive tendencies in the male persona. Male appreciation and esteem of women as mothers, healers and cultic overseers were elevated. But within city walls a man could have easy access to almost all his needs and easily seize upon opportunities to exploit fellow city dwellers and those deemed as weaker, in particular woman and children.

In the ideas expressed above, it is possible that we might find evidence for the origins of male domination and its continuity into the world of the Israelites that eventually through the Bible filtered into modern times. We could also assume that it is possible that in the community of the pre-monarchic period there existed egalitarian social practices that were inherited from previous population groups in the Levant and that these practices were maintained in early Israel. However, I will argue that the pre-monarchic tribal community was organised in a social structure that benefitted both men and women (see 2.2.2; 2.2.2.1).

According to social evolution theories, societies develop from modest groups into more complex cultures (Meyers 2014:10). However, there are some who believe that though societies 'have changed dynamically in time and space' by means of 'introducing new ways' or a 'combination of ideas' they might also sometimes return 'to old ways' (Giorgi 2001:1). We might find an example of this in the pre-monarchic community that returned 'to old ways' (if ever they had departed from them in the first place).

In other words, instead of the occurrence of oppressive patriarchy, the Iron Age I community in the Hill Country practised the egalitarian principles that that they retained throughout their early history until the pre-monarchic era. These principles might have been transferred from the first population groups into their own society. However, it is more probable that the early Israelites based their egalitarian values on Genesis 1:28 and 2:18, in my opinion. Women in the pre-monarchic period enjoyed autonomy and privileges alongside men as they did in the early communities of peoples. We find evidence for this in

these patriarchal families (and) in which the idea of private property sprang up. The wife and children were held to be the first private property of the husband (Marx & Engels 2000). I believe that analogous to the Egyptian woman of the Late Period, Marxist theory purports that the wife loses her humanity and becomes simply a means of production. In effect, the existence of a class society created unequal opportunities for women as well as their abuse and ‘stolen’ authority (see Marx & Engels 2000).

I imagine that in the same way, certain women in the pre-monarchic era may be conceived to be a means of profit-making or a means to further the interests of the male. These male interests thus render women powerless and make them dependent on male authority and provision. I assume that examples of the advancement of male interest can be found in the offer of Achsah as a reward (Jdg 1:11), the marriages of the daughters of Ibzan (Jdg 12:9) as well as the forcible marriage of the women in Judges 21:12 and 21:23. These passages may be interpreted as evidence of the treatment of women as property that may be traded in the advancement of male interests. The following discussion aims to determine the accuracy of these statements.

#### a. The women from Jabesh Gilead and Shiloh

In the tribal conflict that ensued between the Israelites and the Benjamites, all the Benjamite women and most of the men were wiped out (Jdg 20:48). In Judges 21 the girls from Jabesh Gilead (Jdg 21:12) and Shiloh (Jdg 21:23; see 5.6.5.3) were abducted and given to the Benjamites as wives. I do not believe that the forcible marriages of these women should be seen as a normative feature of the pre-monarchic tribal society (cf Jdg 19:30; 20). Neither do I believe that these women were treated as commodities of exchange. Their ordeals were the consequence of a decay in the moral fibre and theocracy of the pre-monarchic tribal community.

Smith, S (1997) remarks that a certain anthropological theory holds that the

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the characters of Achsah, (Jdg 1:14-15), Deborah and Jael (Jdg 4-5), and the mothers of Samson and Micah (Jdg 14:2-5; 17:1-5).

Analogous to the hunter-gatherer women, the settler women in the pre-monarchic era actively participated in their production and reproduction tasks. As it is held that the women in the earlier population groups gained status and influence in their communities through these tasks, it follows that the Israelite women would have acquired similar standing and authority in their agrarian households. However, absent in the earliest societies was monotheism.

The religious ideologies that were shaped by their religion, i.e. Yahwism, and the theocratic nature of their society (see 2.2-2.2.2.1) were that added ingredient that, in my opinion, ‘legitimised’ women’s authority in the pre-monarchic age.

exchange of women is universally a societal norm. Women were acquired from their fathers, brothers and other male family members. They were submissive victims of male sexual aggression resulting in a state of asymmetry between men and women (Smith, S 1997).

However, the crimes committed against the girls from Jabesh Gilead and Shiloh occurred in a period in which the Israelites seem to have abandoned a great deal of compassion, morality and wisdom (see 2.3; Webb 2012:216). Judges 21:12 indicates a military context for the men's behaviour<sup>120</sup> and Judges 21:23 indicates counsel by injudicious and corrupt elders. These are signs of the disintegration of cultural norms and benevolent leadership in the eroding theocratic nature of the social organisation of the proto-Israelites. Judges 21:22 indicates that the abduction of the girls of Shiloh was not considered to be the custom of the Israelite tribal community, but rather a custom taken over by the Israelites during their adoption of the Canaanite religious system. There probably would have been an outcry against the perpetrators by the male family members of the women of Shiloh (cf Jdg 21:22). However, the elders and abductors were well prepared with their responses and in seeking justification for their actions; they indirectly acknowledged their guilt and wrongdoing.

The Marxist viewpoint also includes the idea that earliest societies were gender equal because they were subsistence economies (Smith, S 1997).<sup>121</sup> It holds that every subsequent economic structure which involved property, the division of labour and the generation of wealth created unequal balances in power between men and women. However, McNutt (1999:73-74) points out that the distribution of wealth (in the pre-monarchic era) occurred along the lines of land. Land was allocated to individuals or extended families in a 'communal type of land ownership', which is indicative of an egalitarian social system operative in the pre-monarchic era (McNutt 1999:73-74).<sup>122</sup> Accordingly, women such as Achsah (cf Jdg 1;14-15) in the extended family socio-

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<sup>120</sup> It is still a practice in modern times for the victors of a military campaign to rape women. One of the most pertinent examples is the abduction, continuous rape, torture and forcible marriages of Syrian and Kurdish women when rebel and terrorist groups capture their towns and cities.

<sup>121</sup> Smith, S (1997) and Stearns et al (2011:20, 38, 43); as well as Hughes and Hughes (2001:119) mention earlier societies in which women enjoyed authority and equality. Many of the same elements I believe are found in the pre-monarchic era. Parallel to earlier societies, pre-monarchic men and women had separate tasks, but their relationship would have been more egalitarian and harmonious (see Smith, S 1997).

<sup>122</sup> McNutt (1999:74), however, also remarks that 'it is unlikely that there was a truly egalitarian socio-economic structure in Iron Age I' because 'some differentiation in status power and wealth' would occur.

economic structure could own property and certain women, the mother of Micah<sup>123</sup> for example (Jdg 17:2-3), could be wealthy. This type of situation, therefore, is not indicative of a class society in the pre-monarchic period in which women were consistently oppressed.<sup>124</sup>

### 3.1.3.2 *The subjugation of women*

#### a. Oppressed women or equal members of the community?

Analyses of ancient families and by extension class and gender relations in a society are determined by means of ‘production and distribution, structures and conduits of power, and ideology which are determinate of inequality’ (Simkins 1999:72). Fuchs (2005:221) notes that if women ‘are not given access into public and symbolic social systems, or to political leadership positions’ as credit or compensation – economic or symbolic – for their productive and reproductive activities, ‘then the conclusion that they are... exploited by a patriarchal system is inescapable’.

Meyers (1988:28)<sup>125</sup> observes that according to Engels the subjugation of women lies in the ‘privatization of economic surplus’. Jackson (2013:1-28) comments that the oppression of women exists in the sexually dominant and aggressive nature of the male, female biology and male stereotypes of woman. In addition, women’s repression exists in the negative impact of prejudices against women and associated practices that have continued through history (Jackson 2013:1-28).

Locating the roots of female subjugation and inequality in the past inevitably

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<sup>123</sup> In Judges 17:1-5, Micah stole his mother’s shekels of silver and violated Deuteronomy 5:13, 19. It is therefore a crime that Block (1999a:51) describes as reprehensible and an act of abuse against his mother. Micah heard his mother cursing the one who stole her wealth (see 4.3.5; Jdg 17:1-2). Afraid of the outcome of her curse, Micah confessed his crime and handed back the stolen money. His mother, probably eager to undo her curse, swiftly blessed him and pledged the silver, that was turned later into a sacred icon by Micah (Jdg 17:4).

<sup>124</sup> Ascribing to the texts above, pertinent instances of women’s subjugation and exploitation under a system of oppressive male rule in a class society in general might be misleading. Price [sa] believes that Exodus 11:1-10 alludes to a deeper and mystical meaning to the actions of people in the Old Testament (cf Elwart 2016; cf 2.3.3.3). These texts could be interpreted as examples of male selfishness, inconsideration and moral decay – a large part of the human condition in every society throughout history. Because Bible theology deals with the spiritual aspects of man and his relationship with God, the actions of the men in the passages above should be seen within this context (Price [sa]). Consequently, according to the Book of Judges, it is the collapse of the theocracy that brings about the ruin of women and the Israelite society (cf Dan 9).

<sup>125</sup> Private property revolutionised relations between men and women in a family since it altered the socio-economic and political situation in the broader society. People could acquire a surplus of goods for trade with other households, which with later developments came to replace the household’s production for use and thus decreased the importance of women’s labour in the domestic domain and subsequently her status in society (Sacks 1975:216-217).

led second-wave feminist historians to scrutinise the treatment of women in the Bible (Purvis 2004:40-42). Given these (Marxist) perspectives,<sup>126</sup> and after their evaluation of gender in the Bible, these feminist scholars confidently believed that the cards were stacked up against gender equality in the pre-monarchic tribal community. However, if we believe that the ‘cultural meanings’ and social patterns of behaviour inherent in the passages of Genesis represent the tribal Israelite perceptions of gender (Simkins 1999:76), it is possible that they would have taken these perceptions with them to their new settlements on the Hill Country. According to the Biblical narrative, the Israelite tribes was a relatively new society in Canaan (see Wood 2008a),<sup>127</sup> but one that brought age-old traditions and customs with them. Through monotheism, their belief in YHWH and under His covenantal rule that fostered an ideal for benevolent patriarchy, both men and women could thrive. To my mind, the memories and lives of the patriarchs and the matriarchs would have been kept alive because they played such a vital role in the monotheistic faith of the proto-Israelites.

#### b. The stories in Genesis and gender equality

The stories in Genesis<sup>128</sup> and Exodus were probably recounted repeatedly by mothers and grandmothers lest the younger generation forget their rich and vibrant past. Genesis sets the stage for an equal partnership between the man and his wife<sup>129</sup> for God declared both the man and the woman as earth’s rulers. The man and the woman would be equal

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<sup>126</sup> It is paradoxical that Purvis (1995:5) describes the second wave of the feminist movement in Britain as perceiving ‘Socialism/Marxism’ to be a ‘male bias’.

<sup>127</sup> See 2.2.1 where I hold to the Exodus-Conquest model and an external to Canaan origins of the Israelite tribal community (see Wood 2008a).

<sup>128</sup> The historicity of the Bible and the Genesis account of creation are in great dispute in modern times. It is not the focus of this study to confirm or deny the veracity of the Bible. Instead this study focuses on the interpretation of the Biblical texts (particularly as they relate to women) which have had such a major impact on Western society (cf Dyas & Hughes 2005:1).

<sup>129</sup> The opening chapter of Genesis renders the spectacular account of the creation. Almost immediately after inscribing this magnificent event, the author of Genesis encapsulates the defining quality in the relationship between the newly created man and woman in one word: helper/his equal (Gn 2:18). The modern definition of the word can convey an unequal partnership between two people in terms of their power and position. God made the woman from the man but imparted in her His divine authority to influence and uphold the man in a unique relationship of parity that was not to be found in the rest of creation.

Clarke (1832a) and Barnes (1870a) emphasise the social aspect of the relationship between the man and the woman in Genesis 2:18. The woman and the man were created to enjoy each other’s companionship in a communion of equality of intelligence, equality in matrimony, equality in feelings and conversation and in pursuits. Coffman (1999a) and Constable (2012a) comment on the state of incompleteness and a lack of fulfilment suffered by the man without an equal and intelligent representative of him in the form of a woman/wife/partner (Benson 1857b; Ellicott 2016a).

in nature, leadership and authority (cf Gn 1:28; 1:18).<sup>130</sup> By narrating the creation stories in Genesis to their children, the women of the household might have made both their sons and daughters aware of the equality God decreed for both genders. However, the balance of power within the dominant cultural ideology at times apparently favoured the male (cf Van der Merwe & Coetzee 2009; Le Roux 2015; 2016). In my opinion, this situation was particularly true when the people abandoned YHWH's ideal of equality for all under His covenantal rule.

### c. The people's 'understanding of gender'

Inextricably tied to their monotheistic religion, the pre-monarchic men and women were likewise bound to their land. Accordingly, the people's 'understanding of gender' was presented in the Genesis narrative in which a comparison is made between reproduction and farming (Simkins 1999:76). The arid land the man tilled and toiled could only be converted into fruitfulness when the man 'sow his seed' in the fields (Simkins 1999:76). In the same way that the man dominates the land and coerces it to succumb to his will, he must subjugate a woman according to his sensual nature and for her to be productive economically and reproductively (Simkins 1999:76). Constable (2012a) notes that it is this mutual dependence of the association between the man and the woman in Genesis 2:18 that underpins their relationship.<sup>131</sup> Whedon (1909a) expresses the mutuality in work tasks, reciprocity of feelings and in giving counsel. Calvin (1857), in contrast to Simkins (1999:76) who emphasises the reproductive role of the man and the woman in their partnership, extends the relationship beyond their reproductive capacity and physical needs.

The man and the woman were to be happy with each other in sharing the

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<sup>130</sup> The author of Genesis grants the impression that this relationship is extremely important to the creation and the future development of human nature and society. God created a perfect world, but a certain kind of essential unity for the man was not yet established. Scholars appear to be divided as to what this type of unity between the man and the woman entails. The woman was not created to complement the man, to perfect or complete him but to be united to him as an equal partner – one half of a 'single persona' (Stolper 1992:34). Most modern scholars who base their opinions on the Hebrew translation *ezer-kenegdo* (cf 2.3.3.1) agree that the woman was a complete individual and with a power that speaks of equality.

She would occupy similar and equal roles in her world. It is unnecessary to define the role of the man in creation because in clearly demarcating the position of the women, that of the man is discovered as well. To spell out the function of the man would only be a reiteration because the woman and man are, albeit two distinct and separate persons, a united being.

<sup>131</sup> Constable (2012a) points that there is no account of the creation of woman in ancient Near Eastern texts. He comments that the importance of the woman is such that six verses are devoted to her in contrast to the one on Adam (Gn 2:17).

blessings God had given them in terms of their (sexual and non-sexual) communion and unity<sup>132</sup> according to YHWH's hope for them under His theocratic rule. I believe that it would be misguided for (feminist) scholars to say that the pre-monarchic tribal community could not have attempted to incorporate ideologies of gender equality (that are reflected in the Biblical texts)<sup>133</sup> during the theocracy.

The one and only difference between men and women, it seems, is physiological for all obvious reasons. It is this distinction that has been used against woman and named as a cause of their oppression. The physical strength of men gave them a superior

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<sup>132</sup> In addition, the Song of Solomon and other Biblical texts allude to gender equality in early Israel (cf Jdg 4:4; 14:2; Ps 68:17; Pr 1:20-21; 1 Chr 7:24; 2 Ki 22:14, for example).

<sup>133</sup> I also believe that in addition to these Biblical texts, certain societies indigenous to South Africa could easily reflect the equality that existed in ancient Israel. Lenski (1984:3) believes that historically societies have not shown any signs of absolute egalitarian social structures (cf McNutt 1999:74). Nevertheless, certain hunter-gatherer societies may have closely resembled this standard. Archaeological evidence indicates that the San people may represent the history of the Late Stone Age. San communities reflect patterns of 'mutual communion' in the equality, freedom and harmony evident within the relationship between San men and women (South African History Online 2015. The San.

From: <http://www.sahistory.org.za/article/san>).

Studies of the San, one of the oldest surviving societies of Southern Africa, show that while men hunt and women gather plant food, women may occasionally join a hunting party, and men may from time to time gather plants for consumption. (Kruger National Park 2015. San.

From: [http://www.krugerpark.co.za/africa\\_bushmen.html](http://www.krugerpark.co.za/africa_bushmen.html)).

Their hunter-gathering lifestyle created a great selfless interdependence between the sexes that secured their survival (Shostak 2006:87-89). The idea that San-typified equality between men and women in the ancient Near East and in ancient Israel was not repeated in epochs after circa 4000 BC could be misleading. In the central Hill Country of pre-monarchic Israel, the relationship that existed between Israelite men and women mirrored the ancient and modern San in various ways.

The following commonalities may serve as evidence of the egalitarian structure of the Israelite community in the pre-monarchic era. Although the San was a nomadic hunter-gather group, the Israelites' background included a nomadic lifestyle. The interdependence created by nomadism (Shostak 2006:87-89) was therefore already deeply entrenched in the Israelite community at the time of settlement in ancient Canaan. Both populations experienced harsh and arid environmental and climatic conditions which facilitated cooperation between men and women and naturally gender interdependence.

Both groups organised themselves in smaller groups that preserved their population numbers well. This also served to induce men and women to work together (Meyers 1997:33; cf Meyers 2013:186). Like San groups in the past, modern San communities are made up of 25 members (Kruger National Park 2015. San. From: [http://www.krugerpark.co.za/africa\\_bushmen.html](http://www.krugerpark.co.za/africa_bushmen.html)).

The archaeological record indicates small numbers for the Israelite kinship assemblages in their villages (Stager 1985:23; Mazar 1992a:295; Faust 2005:204). Though other elements were involved in the Israelite struggle for survival (cf Jdg 2:1-3; 4:1; 6:1, for example), it appears that as with the San, mutual and peaceful co-existence between men and women guaranteed their continuing existence. Additionally, both communities were egalitarian in conformity with the group ownership of land. An interchangeability of gender roles is also evident, with men occasionally gathering food and women occasionally joining on a hunt, as mentioned above.

In the case of the proto-Israelites, men and women could occupy what can be described as gender-neutral roles generally relevant to religious affairs and tasks such as the offices of prophet and (judiciary) judge (cf Jdg 4:4-5). Women could also switch over to so-called male tasks such as military leadership (Jdg 4-5). Gender interdependence and collaboration is revealed in certain narratives in the San religious mythology (McNamee 1996:53-54).

Gender equality is also evident in the religious beliefs and texts of the Israelites. This, in turn, would encourage the replication of mutual cooperation and reliance in the community. Considering the above, the Israelite community had many of the same features which existed in the preceding San population group that promoted egalitarian values in their communities.

advantage over women, specifically those who were pregnant and nursing mothers. Men also found a sense of superiority in their ability to impregnate women (Ehrenreich 1976).<sup>134</sup> Women's reproductive functions made them dependent on the male and served as grounds for the sexual division of labour and their oppression in the family and society (Dixon 1977; Simkins 1999:71-87).

Yen (2003) comments that men<sup>135</sup> in antiquity also questioned the nature of women and concluded that the female nature was the 'weaker' of the two genders. Without a doubt, the typecast of women as less strong and therefore ethically and intellectually inferior to men are as ancient as Plato and Rabbinic tradition<sup>136</sup> (Yen 2003) and therefore cause for subjugation.



Figure 3.1 Princess Sobeknakht nursing her baby (Hill 2007:10)

<sup>134</sup> Hill (2007:12) observes that the two statuettes of nursing women (see Figure 3.1 and Figure 3.2) from ancient Egypt show the apparent status of women in that society. The two copper figurines depict squatting women nursing babies. The breast-feeding, kneeling posture is usually ascribed to 'informal' figurines of 'unnamed low-status women' from the Old Kingdom to the 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty. However, one statuette (ca 1750-1650 BC) shows an inscription that signifies it to be that of a 'royal woman' (cf Figure 3.1) and the text attached to the other statuette (ca 1878-1650 BC) suggests it to be that of Isis (see Figure 3.2; Hill 2007:12).

Numerous bronze statuettes of Isis nursing the infant Horus regally seated on a throne dated to circa 664-332 BC is more indicative of the 'feminine ideal' and the stature of high-ranking women (Ragazzoli [sa]). These ancient figurines seem to collaborate the (Marxist) idea that (for women) class and rank are closely related. Lower-status women were more likely to be dominated by men.

Class had a definite impact on the function of gender. Biblical and extra-biblical sources affirm the greater independence and liberty of upper class women. Mesopotamian texts reveal that women could go into legal contracts, for instance (Graybill 2015). After the Iron Age I period, ancient Israelite seals with women's names indicate that these women belonged to the upper echelons of society. Only about 35 seals of the thousands with Hebrew inscriptions discovered bear the names of women. A seal with the inscription YZBL may have belonged to the Biblical queen Jezebel (Korpel 2008).

<sup>135</sup> From his theory on the creation of humankind, Plato provided a philosophical foundation for gender inequality that was implicitly adopted by the Jewish and Christian thinkers that followed him' (Yen 2003). However, it is believed that gender inequality goes back to even more ancient times.

<sup>136</sup> Yen quotes Jesus Ben Sirach as saying: 'Do not look upon any [woman] for beauty, and do not sit in the midst of women; for from the garments comes the moth, and from a woman comes woman's wickedness. Better is the wickedness of a man than a woman who does good; and it is a woman who brings shame and disgrace' – Sirach 42:13-14 (Yen 2003).





Figure 3.2 Ancient Egyptian woman nursing (possibly Isis nursing Horus) (Hill 2007:11)

However, the independent actions and authority of Achsah, Deborah and Jael to name but a few women in the Book of Judges apparently negate the idea of the oppressed and powerless woman in the pre-monarchic period. The nature of settlement life in the Hill Country seemed to promote a system of heterarchy (see 2.2.2.1; 4.3.4.1; 4.3.7.5; 5.1.1; 5.3.2). Apparently, heterarchy along with theocracy (see 2.2, 2.2.2; 2.2.2.1; 2.3.3), were conducive to gender equality. Consequently, the previous statements regarding the subjugation of women in all eras in antiquity simply do not hold true. The women in the pre-monarchic period were not weak in any way and revealed an intellectual intelligence that surpassed physical strength of the men in their situations (cf Jdg 1:14; 4; 5; 13:23).

#### d. Gender and space

Archaeological evidence indicates that the pre-monarchic communities (and households) were organized according to gender and their specific activities in such areas. According to a ‘dualistic modelling of society’, the functionality of population groups is grouped into two sections: the private and public spheres (Ploger 1974:90-92; Meyers 1988:32). The private domain is usually allocated to the feminine interests involving reproduction and economic activities (see Chapter Five) inside her home. The male operated public area is where men congregated to decide upon matters – legal, political, religious and social that were outside the realm of the requirements of their households (Meyers 1988:32).

Graybill (2015) observes that ‘scholars have found a visual representation of this division (the domestic space as female space and the public space as male space) in plaques that represent a woman looking out a window’’ ([insertion mine], see Figure 3.3; cf Jdg 5:28). In Judges (Jdg 5:28) Sisera’s mother looks out of a window waiting for her son to return home. Windows may be symbolic of ‘social opposition and hierarchies at any scale’. Women at windows are royal women ‘whose gaze should carry social and political weight’ and always employed in context where danger

threatens, as in the case of Sisera's mother and her lament as she peered out of her window (Seeman 2004:2,15, 17).



Figure 3.3 Woman at a window (furniture plaque of a woman at a window from Assyria 1365-609 BC)  
([http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/images/hb/hb\\_57.80.12.jpg](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/images/hb/hb_57.80.12.jpg))

Seeman (2004:15) relates windows to be emblematic of female confinement and subjugation in household spaces by men (cf Exum 1992:89). This division of household space reflected gender divisions in the larger society. Space thus became a means of excluding and marginalising women from religious, social and economic behaviour, particularly when these activities were performed in male-allocated domains (Exum 1992:89; Seeman 2004:15; cf Graybill (2015).

Baker (2002:15-17) notes that archaeologists use gender mapping to identify 'women's quarters and men's quarters in individual houses'. As a result, the 'more public parts of a house including courtyards' were thought of as male areas, while more secluded areas were regarded as female spheres. The isolation of women in an interior part of a house gave men more control over female mobility and facilitated female dependence on men (Baker 2002:15-17).

However, Baker (2002:19) argues 'there are no halakhic traditions associated with domestic seclusion of women or the construction of men's quarters and women's quarters in houses'. In addition, Graybill (2015) claims that 'women also draw water, work in the fields and perform other labour' (cf Jdg 1: 14-15; Jdg 4). Finally, it is not known how the (pre-monarchic) Israelite community 'experienced their live spaces as either male or female' (Maier 2003:4). Therefore, it cannot be conclusively stated that Israelite household spaces were organised and occupied according to gender hierarchical structures. It is possible, however, that there might have been a heterarchical instead of a hierarchical household structure in place in which all the members in the household, despite their age, gender and status, were considered equally important and productive.

## 3.2 POSITIVE IMPACTS ON GENDER RELATIONS

### 3.2.1 Households and egalitarianism

In view of the above, the argument for gender egalitarianism (see 3.2.1.1) in Iron Age I is borne out by the floor plan of the four-room house (see 4.6.2.1 and 5.2.2.1). Faust and Bunimovitz (2014:152) note that the typical four-room plan lacks ‘access hierarchy’. The arrangement of rooms in the four-room house portrays ‘a more egalitarian spirit’ than preceding house plans in the area (see 5.2.3.2). Faust and Bunimovitz (2014:152) observe the absence of decorations on pottery, the lack of imported pottery, simple burials and the lack of royal inscriptions as archaeological evidence for the egalitarian ‘ethos’ of the Israelites throughout Iron Age I and Iron Age II.<sup>137</sup> As mentioned before, McNutt (1999:72-74) reports the archaeological record reflects egalitarianism in the socio-economic structure of the Iron Age I Israelite settlers.<sup>138</sup>

#### 3.2.1.1 *Egalitarianism in village life*

In their role as wife and mother, Deborah and other women described in the Book of Judges are the archetypal mothers who lived a simple existence grouped together with their fellow Israelites in small communities without palaces or monumental buildings. Archaeological digging of these settlements ‘creates the impression of an egalitarian society in comparison to the ‘socially stratified larger towns located in the lowlands’ (Hess 1999:498). People were poor with insufficient or no economic surplus and therefore their society could not support an advanced class system with a cohesive and wealthy, upper class structure (Kletter 2002:39).<sup>139</sup>

<sup>137</sup> For a discussion of this idea, see also Tringham (1999:93-131) and Sebag (2005) who notes that the Iron Age dwelling revealed the ‘social arrangement of Israelite men and women, their world view, their needs, their resources...and their available technologies’.

<sup>138</sup> She adds, however that equality in village life is indicated ‘in the sense that there is no clear evidence of division of labour’ (McNutt 1999:72).

<sup>139</sup> Kletter bases his findings of the poverty of Israelites on the rarity of burials and the simple burials of their dead on the highlands of Iron Age I Israel. The Israelites were too poor to bury their dead with grave goods, which accounts for burials without a great number of burial objects or the burial of a noble class (Kletter 2002; Faust 2013:45-49, 62-63). Faust believes that despite the archaeological evidence for Israelite poverty in Iron I, they did have access to economic surpluses. Faust argues that the infrequency of Israelite burials lasted into the period of the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah and that these societies were not poor. Furthermore, burial goods were not expensive and the ‘Iron I society, which clearly possessed material surpluses could afford them’ (Faust 2013:46). These findings indicate a lack of social classes.

It appears that the society in which Deborah functioned was every bit as unruly as the Book of Judges portrays it to be. Evidence for Israelite egalitarianism may be as much the result of sparse food resources and natural resources as it is ideology (Hess 1999:498; Deist 2000:263). Indeed, Hess describes the Marxist theory that underlines the Peasant Revolt Model (see 2.2.1) as being too ‘anachronistic to explain a phenomenon about which we know little’ (Hess 1999:498). Though the archaeological record points towards relative egalitarian social and economic structures, the agrarian pre-monarchic community was not a true egalitarian society (Meyers 1988:30, 169, 172, 191-192; Faust 2013:45-49, 62-63) because, as Faust states, the possible differences between social reality and its supposed material representations are multiple (Faust 2013:47). Thus, and as mentioned above (see 3.1.3.2), a strong egalitarian ethos in early (pre-monarchic) Israel is expressed in the simplicity of their pottery, the ‘rarity of temples, and the floor plan of the four-room house’ (Faust 2013:49; 4.6.2.1; 5.2.3.1; 5.2.3.3).

Meyers (1997:29-34) concludes that egalitarianism and hierarchical gender structures cannot be conclusively established in early (pre-monarchic) Israel. A heterarchical system, however, could assist to understand the complexities within the early Israelite community (Meyers 2006:251). In this model, male domination in ranked structures was overthrown and both men and women contributed to the shaping of the Israelite community within a diversity of organisations and numerous places of power (Meyers 2006:251). It is a model that contests the theory of patriarchy by acknowledging that women’s specific organisations, ‘each with its own set of rankings, privileges, and statuses, would hold authoritative roles vis-à-vis other systems’ (Meyers 2006:251).

Consequently, on the highlands of Palestine, the proto-Israelites with their oath to establish an egalitarian society carved out a new life for themselves. That was reflected in the ‘biblical view as the theological description of a (unique) socio-political process’ (Meyers 1988:53).

### *3.2.1.2 The environment*

The environment of the Hill Country seems to have nurtured egalitarianism. The people were subject to the harsh climate and an arid landscape. Scheepers (2010:287) notes that it required much hard work, skill and creative technology on the side of the Israelites to turn the inhospitable soil into ‘sustainable living conditions’. The climate

of ancient Palestine was severe. Temperatures varied from great diurnal heat to intense cold at night (Deist 2000:123). The winds came mainly from the west (King & Stager 2001:86). The scorching eastern desert wind desiccated the grass and brought blight to crops. Locusts devastated crops as well (Deist 2000:122-123). Rain was cyclical and water was scarce because the country lacked sufficient rivers and springs. Gales, storms and frightening displays of thunder and lightning (Deist 2000:122-123) were not uncommon weather phenomena. The Central Highlands had two seasons: an arid summer and a wet winter season (King & Stager 2001:86). The winter seasons received more precipitation, but much of the rain would drain away before it could be used for agricultural purposes (Meyers 1988:54). As an agrarian society, the proto-Israelites were entirely dependent on the rainfall, 'the timing being as significant as the amount' (King & Stager 2001:86). To transform the land into a viable one seemed to have necessitated the skill and abilities of both men and women.

The inventive proto-Israelites transformed the hill lands by introducing terraces. Terracing had multiple advantages: they increased the crop-yielding capacity of the land and made it suitable for dry-land farming; more effective water management systems were put in place; and large-scale soil erosion was prevented (Scheepers 2010:289-293). Terraces built in Iron Age I can still be seen in Ai and Raddana, towns to the north and east of Jerusalem (Scheepers 2010:289-293). Terrace farming ensured the permanent presence of the Israelite settlements in the highlands. Runoff farming developed from terracing and was a creative method to conserve water that was lost during sudden rainstorms and to increase farming land. A crucial lack of water supplies in the semi-arid Hill Country led early (pre-monarchic) Israelites to build water cisterns to collect and conserve water in the winter months (Scheepers 2010:288-293).

Subsequently, the daily lives of the proto-Israelites were embroiled in hard manual labour and the mental exertion to stay one step ahead of the forbidding topography and hostile climate in the Hill Country of the tribal community (see Ebeling 2010:16-17). Naturally, the labour and skills of every Israelite were considered essential to their continued existence as a people in the Hill Country. To my mind, the last thing one might imagine on the minds of the proto-Israelites would be harsh and oppressive rules for woman within a patriarchal system in place. The land and labour requirements necessitated women's cooperation and autonomy within an egalitarian economic and theocratic social system.

### *3.2.1.3 The tasks of women in the pre-monarchic period*

It has been mentioned before that in some ways it was possible for women to ‘cross over’ to perform men’s tasks (see Footnote 133). However, the gruelling environment and the backbreaking labour involved meant that certain tasks such as clearing the land of trees and brush and the carving of cisterns would have been allocated to the Israelite men (Meyers 1988:56). To the Israelite women were left the equally vital tasks of food production such as bread baking and the manufacturing of cloth (Meyers 2002b:28-33; Ackerman 2003:175-177; Ebeling 2010:17).

The basic requirements of any subsistence group: provision of food and housing, reproduction, defending all and caring for the young and old are vital to its continued existence (Meyers 1988:56; Deist 2000:233). In the achievement of their societal objectives, men and women are entirely dependent on each other to ensure group survival. Therefore, their contributions towards their society are evident in the tasks assigned to each gender, with all tasks as they pertained to group survival, being of equal value (Deist 2000:233). Meyers (1988:56) asserts that frontier conditions required increased labour in terms of pioneering tasks and ‘those necessary for the normal production of food and clothing’. This means while men were engaged in pioneering tasks, women had to perform, in addition to their own, those tasks of production ordinarily assigned to men, particularly when the men were engaged in warfare.

An increased workload on the highlands had a direct impact on women and their capability to produce the ‘maximum number of children’ in addition to other production tasks to satisfy the (economic) needs of the group (Meyers 1988:56-57; Deist 2000:234). Environmental and agrarian conditions in the Hill Country of the pre-monarchic community served to enhance the influence of Israelite women. Their value intensified according to an increase in the tasks imposed upon them in their lives in the central highlands with its harsh environment and severe climate as well as new and challenging agricultural circumstances. Below I will discuss the idea that despite their gender, women could attain authority and status in their community (at times under YHWH’s rule and at times in the hybrid cult women followed).

#### *a. Women's specific religious tasks*

I believe that women in the pre-monarchic period were indeed undertaking those socio-economic, religious and political roles confirmed by the archaeological, sociological

and ethnographic record of Iron Age I (see Chapter Four and Five; Ackerman 2003:176; Ebeling 2010:18). Proto-Israelite women, according to Judges, also had other important responsibilities in their communities (cf Jdg 4-5) in ‘addition to their control of household subsistence activities and technologies’ (Ebeling 2010:18) that impacted favourably on their authority and status in their community. In terms of their religious customs, women played a significant role that may be thought of as another cohesive element in their households and as powerful as the religious role of men in the public sphere. A woman's role as mother in her family might have taken on sacred aspects in the domestic religion.<sup>140</sup> In Phrygian art<sup>141</sup> of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC, the ancient goddess Cybele (see figure 3.4) is depicted as a guardian goddess known as ‘Mother’ (Simpson 1996:198-201; cf Roller 1999:67-68; Motz 1997:115).<sup>142</sup> This early goddess may also be representative of the worship of female deities in the pre-monarchic period by the proto-Israelites in Judges.



Figure 3.4 Cybele ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cybele#/media/File:Cybele\\_formiae.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cybele#/media/File:Cybele_formiae.jpg))

<sup>140</sup> Although the various religious roles of women and the authority and autonomy they probably held in the official, foreign and domestic cults are discussed in Chapter Four, I am including this section on women's authority in the religions of the pre-monarchic period to demonstrate that contrary to the traditional viewpoint of the subjugated and powerless woman, the woman in the pre-monarchic period could achieve much authority and independence in her society and because of her religious role might have acquired an equality on par with men's religious roles in the public domain. Therefore, despite her gender (the non-ideal body), discrimination against women in the pre-monarchic period might have been less drastic than in other eras.

<sup>141</sup> The Venus of Willendorf (is the oldest example that) epitomises the ‘ideal’ woman who is fertile and delivers abundant provisions in her community (Hays-Gilpin 2004:19). The Venus of Willendorf or the Woman of Willendorf is a female statuette, 11.1 cm in height and dates to around 28 000-25 000 BC. She was discovered in an Austrian village, Willendorf, after which she was named. The figurine is carved in limestone with a red ochre hue (Witcombe 2003) and shows a nude and robustly figured woman. Though there is no contextual framework for her, she has the assigned meaning of representing a fertility goddess (Naturhistorisches Museum of Vienna 2012. Nude Woman (Venus of Willendorf). From: <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/prehistoric-art/paleolithic-art/v/nude-woman-venus-of-willendorf-c-28-000-25-000-b-c-e>).

<sup>142</sup> Takacs (1996:376) connects Cybele's origins to the 6<sup>th</sup> millennium BC Anatolian mother goddess type found at Çatal Hüyük.

As we will find out in Chapter Four, women might have been priestesses and healers in their communities, positions that date back to earlier times. Evidence for this may be found in the statuette of a seated woman holding a cup and a plant uncovered in the temple of Inanna (Hansen & Dales 1962:81). According to Hansen and Dales (1962:81), the woman may be a priestess or a healer or even a woman who held magical wisdom and powers. Foreign religious influences and practices of goddess veneration, although forbidden by YHWH, were common practices in the proto-Israelite community (see Chapter Four). The people had always been open to the ideas and cultures of their neighbours as indicated in the Book of Judges (2:11-13; 3:6-7; 6:25; 8:27, 33-34; 10:6). These foreign influences included the pull of the almost identical Babylonian and Assyrians religious cults (Jastrow 1898:47, 696; Stern 2001a:307-308) which were transferred into the Canaanite religions. Stern (2001a:205-207) reports on the multitude of circa 8<sup>th</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> century BC fertility female statuettes discovered all over Israel. These statuettes probably show a continuity of the worship of the sacred goddess in pre-monarchic Israel that might have been inherited from earlier ancient Near Eastern communities. The veneration of the mother figure in society through the sacred goddess combined with the Israelites' religious ideologies regarding women (cf Gn 1:28; 2:18; 17:15) might have constituted a significant thrust of empowerment to women. In the worship of the sacred goddess, women defined themselves by the standards of the goddess[es] in her role as mother. This served to emphasise motherhood and a mother's authority in the community.

A woman involved in magical practices associated with the veneration of Asherah possibly gained a great deal of influence and status in her community (cf Jdg 17:1-5; see Chapter Four).<sup>143</sup> Whether associated with Asherah or not, the pre-monarchic community believed that certain women were endowed with supernatural skills. Pedersen (1991:164) describes these women as types of soul hunters. That is, in return for payment they could by means of their rituals, spells and incantations, 'pursue and kill souls' (cf Ez 13:17-21; Pedersen 1991:164). Despite the prohibitions against the worship of foreign gods and related practices and rituals, which also included sacred medicine and healing (Gilboa 2007:346), the truth is that women might have seized the

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<sup>143</sup> For the pre-monarchic Israelite, the worship of the sacred feminine would not have been an alien concept. They had adopted the worship of the goddess Asherah, as is evident in Judges. We find a 'syncretic' religion that was practised and that is collaborated by archaeology (Vriezen 2001:45-80; Becking 2001:151-163; Dijkstra 2001:164-188).



opportunity that came with these sacred customs to gather respect and promote their authority in the pre-monarchic Israelite community.<sup>144</sup>

#### b. Women as protectors and guardians

In light of the above, it comes as no surprise that Deborah's court was held under a palm tree for it represented fertility, protection and abundance. Deborah, however, was a faithful believer in YHWH and seemed not to have indulged in the religious idolatries of her people. These are all the qualities that defined Deborah and the women she might have embodied in the pre-monarchic period. Bailey reports that women are frequently depicted as protectors in the Bible and names Rahab, Rebecca, Sarah and Jael as examples (Bailey 1998:13-21). It is not astonishing that YHWH had called a woman to lead the Israelite tribes to a call to battle, or that she could participate in a military campaign (see 4.3.7.1). The theocracy of the pre-monarchic tribal community could accommodate the equality of their womenfolk not only spiritually, but also in their humanity (cf Gn 2:18). Furthermore, the gender-neutrality of God was a clear and logical concept held by the early (pre-monarchic) Israelites. In her capacity as *ezer-kenegdo* (i.e. helpmate; see 2.3.3.1; Footnote 57), Deborah became the military might that the term among others implied (cf Gn 2:18).

She was a mother and so protecting her people was part of her nature. However, she would have been worried. The Israelites lacked the advanced weaponry of their enemies (De Vaux 1997:217-219; cf Jdg 1:19; 4:13). Divine intervention was needed and when YHWH gave them victory over the Canaanites, it was received by a joyous

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<sup>144</sup> Positive archetypes of early females furthermore appear in a description of the Biblical description of the noble wife in Proverbs 31. According to the NIV, Proverbs 31 was written by various authors including King Solomon who penned the largest portion. Proverbs 31 ends with King Lemuel who wrote the last chapter. Some scholars believe Proverbs was written (between 1000 and 900 BC). Other scholars think it was written later, circa 350 BC (Malick 2004). It is believed by some that it was Bathsheba herself advising her son, King Solomon, in Proverbs 31 (Beck 2008:1-2; cf Wesley 1765). She may have been alluding to herself in the character of the noble woman (cf also Clarke 1832c; Whedon 1909d).

The writer of Proverbs 31 might have known the grandmother or great-grandmother who came from that era (of the pre-monarchy) and who possibly also could be the inspiration behind the text. Because of her character and industrious activities, the husband is wealthy and respected (Proverbs 31:23). The wife seems to have a good amount of power, status and independence, and therefore her relationship with her husband takes on a form of equality (Beck 2008:1-4) that is comparable to modern marriages. Bushnell has suggested that the word *cha-yil* in Prov. 31:10, used more than 200 times in the Hebrew Bible and that has been interpreted as virtuous and noble, has been mistranslated.

The original meaning is might, power or strength, adjectives that relate to war (Bushnell 1943:223-224). The wife in Proverbs 31, however, may simply be an invention, an ancient form of today's (mythic) superwoman conceived by an early 'patriarchal imagination' (Sandoval 2006:201). On the other hand, the wife may be based on a pre-monarchic antecedent who experienced a greater amount of autonomy and authority through her economic and cultic activities in her household.

woman and man (Jdg 5).

It was a woman and a man who possibly made Israel a recognisable opponent in the ancient Near Eastern world. The intimate relationship of the man and woman in the first chapter of Genesis was typified by a shared equality. Deborah and Barak in Judges 4-5 might symbolise the equality between men and women as suggested in the *ezer-kenegdo relationship* of Genesis 2:18 (see 2.3.3.1) that extended from the household into the larger community. The Merneptah Stele (see Figure 3.5) is the earliest known recorded reference to Israel (Wood 2003:273-274; cf Albright 1937:24). The allusion to Israel signifies that towards the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century BC, the Israelites had achieved adequate power and status among the ancient Near Eastern nations to merit ‘being defeated by the king (Merneptah) of one of the strongest nations (Egypt) on the earth’ (insertions mine). ‘Perhaps Deborah and Barak’s (collaboration and) defeat of Hazor and Sisera and his army ([insertion mine], Jdg 4-5) about this time brought Israel onto the stage of international politics’ (Wood 2003:374).



Figure 3.5 The Merneptah Stele  
([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Merneptah\\_Stele#/media/File:Merneptah\\_Israel\\_Stele\\_Cairo.JPG](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Merneptah_Stele#/media/File:Merneptah_Israel_Stele_Cairo.JPG))

#### 3.2.1.4 *The status of women in the family*

Simkins states that ‘a woman’s life will be filled with labours that are characteristic of a wife and mother in ancient Israel’ (Simkins 1999:71-87). However, I do not believe that these labours included women’s mistreatment and oppression within their household and the system of governance in the wider community during the pre-monarchic period. The Israelite family<sup>145</sup> constituted the basic societal unit in the Hill

<sup>145</sup> Lemche notes that both the nuclear and extended family existed in the Israelite social organisation (Lemche 1985:249). Archaeological and Biblical materials deliver evidence for the existence of the extended family. Environmental challenges on the Highlands of Palestine reinforce this image. Labour requirements also demanded the participation of more hands than a nuclear family could supply (Meyers 1988:19, 49, 55-56, 104-106).

Country of pre-monarchic Israel (Deist 2000:244; King & Stager 2001:36). ‘Age, gender, marriage status, position in the family, economic or political position, occupation and purity determined a family member’s status in the household’ (Deist 2000:260-263).

Be that as it may, several factors including the religious ideology of the proto-Israelites and the shared tasks of men and women may relay the idea of the existence of a heterarchical social organisation within the pre-monarchic period. The harsh environmental and climatic constraints fostered the ‘interdependence of husband and wife’ a ‘feature of early Israelite family households’ (Meyers 1997a:29-34). Household crafts, technologies and activities appear to have been under female management. This would have added to female authority corresponding to the authority of men working in the outdoors.

Apparently, men may not have been favoured above women in the pre-monarchic period. The authority of the *paterfamilias* (see 2.4.1.2; 2.4.1.3) in Iron Age I Israelite society was benevolent; the kind of control that achieved the effectual performance of the family (see 2.4.1.1 a, b, c). In fact, the term *bēt āb* could simply mean ‘descent along male lines’. The division of labour along lines of gender did not mean the subjugation and oppression of women because every family member was deemed essential to the household economy and the survival of the group (Meyers 1997a:29-34). It may be concluded that the women such as Deborah, Achsah, Jael, the daughters of Ibzan, the mothers of Samson and Micah, and Delilah obtained their authority and autonomy from a multitude of features during YHWH’s covenantal rule that comprised the pre-monarchic age.

### 3.3 CONCLUSION

Contrary to feminists’ negative view of a perpetual imbalance between men and women, I wish to promote the idea that gender relations were more balanced in pre-monarchic Israel (see Abraham 2002:161). There are indications of parity between the genders in certain narratives in the Book of Judges (cf Jdg 4-5; 13; 14:2-5; and 17:1-5). Apparently, women enjoyed a great deal of authority and equality according to covenantal laws which required a benevolent patriarchal system in which all would prosper and enjoy YHWH’s blessings and favour.

There was a trend for a society to shift from gender equality and mutual

interdependence to male supremacy and authority, with women as second-class citizens that correspond with any partial dissolution of that society and its moral cores (cf Jdg 20-21). For the pre-monarchic Israelites, this shift in gender equality occurred with the abolition of YHWH's Kingship rule. Whenever benevolent male authority within their theocratic social organisation gave way to corruption, women's authority and status suffered as a result, as specifically revealed in Judges (Jdg 19-21). Thus, indispensable for the survival of the pre-monarchic women and men was their distinctive religion – monotheism<sup>146</sup> – which had a significant influence on the social, political and economic structures of the Israelites. In the idea of the worship of a single Deity, monotheism set the Israelites apart from the rest of the polytheistic nations and their veneration of multiple gods and goddesses. In addition, monotheism cultivated a balance of power that was equally distributed between men and women.

Thus, a spirit of egalitarianism allowed all the members in the community to participate and share in its economic, social and religious life. Women's authority over the domestic processes was vital for the continued survival of the Israelites. It is important to understand an egalitarian ethos was promoted by Israelite monotheism which impacted favourably on patriarchal structures. The Abrahamic and Mosaic traditions (see 2.3.3; 4.3.1) formed a vital part of the identity of both men and women. The religion did not differentiate between men and women in terms of their nature and the authority they could achieve in their households and community (cf Gn 1:28; 2:18). The men and women probably knew that they were interdependent with a corresponding equality that was a crucial element needed for their survival in the Hill Country (cf Gn 2:18; 3:15). A collective sense of a supernaturally purposed destiny, the severe environmental and geographical challenges, hostile enemies and other societal privations created a divergent form of communal authority in which (gender) parity had to exist.

Consequently, theocracy and the nature of their life in the Hill Country permitted women to gain status and authority alongside the men. The ordinary women were overall treated with respect (Jdg 1:14-15), shared parental authority in Judges

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<sup>146</sup> It has been argued that the archaeological record shows that goddess veneration and polytheism predate Israelite monotheism (Frymer-Kensky 1992:1-6). The Bible indicates the Israelites to have practiced the pagan cults of their neighbours. Moreover, archaeological evidence reveals monotheism was practised along with one such 'idolatrous' cult – that of the worship of Astarte (Stern 2001a:205-211). But pure monotheism was also practised by the priests in the Tabernacle at Shiloh and Deborah as well as others in Judges.

14:1-3 and could be wealthy (Jdg17:1-5; Meyers 2014:8-27).<sup>147</sup> Some perceive the existence of gender structures in the pre-monarchic era. Feminist theory holds that the mutual communion between gender groups may have been impaired by unfavourable male ideologies and dominance of women because of, inter alia, their nature and biology. Proto-Israelite men are said to have exploited the reproductory ability of women as well as their labour and female economic contribution. However, gender inequality per se in antiquity is based on interpretational analyses of archaeological and anthropological evidences, and nearly all of these conclusions are seen through the lens of Marxist theories.

Fuchs (2005:220) has criticised Meyer's assertion that the Marxist beliefs that formulated feminists ideas of patriarchy gender inequality are not valid. Meyer (1988:34) discards the notion of 'gender asymmetry' and gender hierarchies in ancient Israel. She believes there is no indication that proto-Israelite women 'felt oppressed, degraded, or unfairly treated in the face of cultural asymmetry'. Gender disparities that seem hierarchical may not have functioned or been perceived as hierarchical within Israelite society (Meyers 1988:34). Gender interdependence seemed to have characterised life in the pre-monarchic period.

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<sup>147</sup> Financial independence meant greater status and autonomy in society. These women demonstrate evidence that patriarchy, in particular oppressive male patriarchy, as an accurate descriptor of the pre-monarchic tribal community seems to be inaccurate (Meyers 2014:8-27). I believe that an oppressive and autocratic system of male rule does not present a woman with decision-making powers (cf Jdg 4-5) or allow her to act autonomously or have authority (cf Jdg 1:14-15; 14:1-3; 17:1-5). A variant form of patriarchy beneficial to women therefore must have been in place in the pre-monarchic era, as discussed in Chapter Two, the consequences of which were mostly beneficial to women. The covenantal rules would allow women to achieve status and power. These elements allowed the pre-monarchic women the type of 'Amazonian female power' that Johnson (2013:29) claims only exists in legends. They lend authority to women, indispensable to the events that led to the achievement of Israelite statehood (Fletcher 1997).

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **WOMEN'S RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES**

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter, the roles and status of women in the pre-monarchic period will be considered in terms of their religious participation firstly in the (unadulterated) official Yahwistic religion, secondly in the popular cult in the public sphere, and thirdly in the syncretic women's cult practised in their households (the household cult). Consequently, the primary aim of this chapter is to investigate the diverse religious activities of women within these three religious settings. Within the Yahwistic religion women had a variety of roles and positions which I will investigate. The popular cult and the household cult were the effects of the broken covenantal relationship with YHWH.

Subsequently, I will discuss what attributes (deities such as Asherah and Baal for example) attracted the Israelites to the popular and household cults. I will look at places of worship and rites involved in the religions worshipped by the pre-monarchic people such as the Tabernacle at Shiloh for instance. In addition, I would like to describe worship at a temple of Baal (in Shechem for example). In doing so, I would like to construe what women might have experienced or encountered at these cultic places. I will examine probable roles of Israelite women, as a priestess for instance, in the popular cult. I will attempt to discover the specific women's cult in the pre-monarchic household. Finally, I would like to find out if women could attain authority and status in the various cults that they followed as a result of benevolent patriarchy.

Religion naturally played a very significant role in the lived reality of the Israelite women. In addition to their economic activities, it was their sacred beliefs that defined their identity and position in society.

#### **4.2 BACKGROUND TO WOMEN'S RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES**

##### **4.2.1 Women's overlooked cultic involvement in the Canaanite cult and Yahwistic religion**

O'Connor (1986:277) notes that 'stories of women abound' in the Book of Judges (see 2.3.2; cf Brenner 1993:9; Hackett 2004:356-364; Gunn 2005:8-10; 13-14; Bacon &

Sperling 2007:561-562; Ackerman 2008a:140). The reader of the Book of Judges, however, will not find narratives exclusive to women's religious activities in public or in private (Dever 2012:55-56). I believe that the narratives of Deborah in Judges 4-5; Jael in Judges 4:17-22; Achsah in Judges 1:14-15; Jephthah's daughter in Judges 11:34-40; the mothers of Samson and Micah in Judges 13; 14:2-5 and 17:1-4 respectively; Delilah in Judges 16; and the concubine of the Levite as well as the girls of Shiloh do touch upon the subject, but these texts do not present a complete picture of these women's lives. Nothing is known about the functions of women in the domestic cult where a woman's religious system was in place. Therefore, one of the purposes of this study is to bring to light what these activities might have been.

Tedlock criticises male scholars for regarding the role of women as healers and prophets (which in my opinion occurred primarily in a religious manner) in antiquity as either less important or simply rejecting it altogether (Tedlock 2005:4-5). Ackerman (1999:22) similarly reproaches the Bible writers for deliberately ignoring women's participation in the Israelite religion.

Meyers (2006:247; 2005a:11) is more accommodating in her critique and states that as women's (religious) activities were mostly confined to their households, they merely went unnoticed by the authors of the Old Testament.

In addition, scholarly interest in the stories of male-dominated groups and establishments in ancient times prevailed over women's specific interests and involvements in the household cult, for example (Meyers 2005a:11; Meyers 2006:247).<sup>148</sup> Women's cultic activities in their households, therefore, were left unreported by both ancient and modern history writers. For this reason, the authority of the ordinary women in the domestic religion has largely been left unexplored.

Meyers also believes feminist Bible scholars such as Bird (1992:949), Frymer-Kensky (1994:17) and Fuchs (2000:11-16) have overemphasised and misunderstood the patriarchal system (cf 2.4.1.1 a, b, c; 2.4.1.2) in the Old Testament and therefore have

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<sup>148</sup> Women's activities, be they religious, economic, or social and although hidden, were just as important as those of the public roles of men. One of the purposes of this chapter of the study is therefore to highlight and uncover as best as possible women's religious activities.

misinterpreted the range and scope of women's cultic roles and authority in the pre-monarchic period (Meyers 2006:246). Questions pertaining to the nature of women's cultic stories – the functions, authority and extent of women's activities at the sacred places (sanctuaries, high places, domestic cult corners) of pre-monarchic Israel – naturally arise from such perspectives.

Women occupied diverse roles and responsibilities in the religion of the pre-monarchic period. I believe that theocracy and consequently benevolent patriarchy allowed women to attain status and occupy various roles in the official religion (see 4.3-4.3.2.8; 4.3.3-4.3.8.4; 4.4-4.4.3.4; 4.4.4-4.4.5; 4.5-4.5.4; 4.6-4.6.4.9). In my opinion, the (religious) authority and autonomy that benevolent patriarchy afforded women were transferred into the popular cult and the (women's specific) household cult even though involvement in these religions would ultimately lead to the ruin of the people's special relationship with YHWH.<sup>149</sup>

#### *4.2.1.1 The influence of women's roles in the pre-monarchic religion(s)*

The frequent social and political destabilisation of the Hill Country should have made the proto-Israelite society in the Book of Judges unsuitable for statehood. And yet, not only did a viable and dynamic economy mostly exist, but so too did effective religious influences remain in place. While men were engaged in warfare, women were apparently

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<sup>149</sup> It is my belief that women's autonomy, instead of showing a slow decrease after the earliest periods, was very much alive and active in the pre-monarchic era. This would be true during the theocracy. The egalitarian spirit of the Israelites was visible in their tasks, rituals and customs. The mother of Samson was performing her work in the field alone (or perhaps she was praying, Jdg 13:9). The daughter of Jephthah and her entourage of girls went into the hills by themselves (Jdg 11:37). The girls of Shiloh were dancing in the vineyards in a women's only ritual (Jdg 21:20, 23). Achsah, in a desire to add to her dowry, went to her father and requested land with water (Jdg 1:14-15).

In the earliest societies, women could 'combine motherhood and productive labour' since there was not any separation 'between the productive and reproductive spheres' (Smith, S 1997). The women in the pre-monarchic era also experienced their reality in the union of productive and reproductive functions as both were centred around the household. It is probable that the mother of Samson, after giving birth to her son, continued to work in the field (cf Jdg 13:9) and possibly performing her weaving activities. The importance of women in the economic production as well as the social and religious structures of the early societies are also to be found in the pre-monarchic era.

Thus, (in both historical periods) women's participation in their communities rendered organised systems of inequality non-existent (Smith, S 1997). This would be particularly appropriate in the pre-monarchic age of benevolent patriarchy, theocracy and the heterarchical social arrangements in the households.



engaged in the pre-monarchic economy and cult. To prevent the complete collapse of an unstable society, such as the pre-monarchic social order, it was necessary for men and women to have a belief in and worship of supernatural power(s) 'as the creator(s) and ruler(s)' of the cosmos and to express 'this belief in conduct and ritual' (Harrod 2011:335). Expressions of religious values usually produce habits and actions that are considered safe and favourable to the well-being of both the individual and the community as a whole. As a result, law and order were maintained, and in the pre-monarchic period these were enforced through institutions such as the Tabernacle at Shiloh and domestic shrines prevalent in Iron Age I (cf Ellwood 1913:299). It appears that women's roles and active involvement in the official religion at Shiloh (and perhaps also in the women's specific household cult) presented a healthy counterbalance to all the warfare and unwholesome activities of the wayward pre-monarchic men.

Considering that women had tasks related to their reproductive lives in addition to their economic responsibilities, the cultic counterbalance was a phenomenal achievement. Women carried a heavier workload (cf Chapter Five) than men, and yet they could hold 'critical roles in the preservation of family customs and traditions' (Ebeling 2010:11). Women generally also had shorter lifespans than men, living only until the age of 30 (Willett 2002:27-29) which reduced their economic and religious impact on their households. Despite the religious roles of Deborah (Jdg 4:4-5) and those of the women serving at the entrance to the Tabernacle (Ex 38:8; 1 Sm 2:22), some scholars hold that the organisational structure of the Israelite religion was male-dominated, which gave women little room for public management roles. Perhaps they hold this opinion given the fact that women could not officiate as priest at the Tabernacle in Shiloh. The above ideas are also brought about by the fact that mainstream academia holds to the view that patriarchy was adversarial to women in the early history of Israel (cf 1.1.1; 1.1.1.1-1.1.1.3 a, b, c, d). In my opinion, however, as mentioned before, it was probable that alongside the women's roles, status and freedom that the theocratic system afforded to women (cf 2.2; 2.2.2.1; 2.3.3), a variant patriarchal system was also in operation that granted women authority and independence (cf 2.4.1; 2.4.1.1 a, b, c; 2.4.1.2).

In Chapter Two, it was shown that the patriarchal system in the pre-monarchic period did not quite fit the conventional mode of male rule and domination. Consequently,

women were more empowered and had more status (cf Meyers 2005a:245-248). The possible reasons why men probably outnumbered women in cultic roles might be due to women's productive and reproductive tasks. The sheer weight of women's responsibilities might have left them without any 'dynamism' to lead in society. However, sacred leadership in the wider society was available to women, and women could and did assume these positions (cf Halton 2010:117).<sup>150</sup>

Furthermore, the acquisition of power that stemmed from women's involvement in the successful operations of the community was augmented by 'female control of certain religious behaviors in Israelite households ... that are linked to female reproductive processes deemed critical for family survival' (Meyers 2006:249; cf Bird 1999:6; Ebeling 2010:11, 30-31, 97; Nakhai 2011:358; Dever 2012:56). It appears that it was their reproductive concerns that underscored women's religious behaviour, which in turn led to religious practices that created a safe and protective environment for their families. This situation had a cumulative effect that flowed into the larger society and so stabilised the country. Halton (2010:117), nevertheless, observes that the prominence given to women's reproduction functions runs 'the risk of directing research into a narrow slice of women's religious lives'.<sup>151</sup>

Accordingly, women (apart from Deborah), restricted to their biological cycles, held secondary status in the Israelite religion, and achieved cultic authority only in the household religion. Halton argues, however, that women participated in domains other than

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<sup>150</sup> (Feminist) academics (Bird 1999:3-20; Willett 2001), in addition, hold that the division of labour also played a major role in women's exclusion from leadership positions in the public domain. It is believed that the gendered allocation of tasks usually ascribes male roles to the production of food and public governance and female roles to management duties related to households (see Chapter Five; Bird 1999:6; Willett 2001). While Bird (1999:6-10), from a feminist perspective, sees this division of labour as marginalising women in the public sphere, Meyers (2005a:60), on the other hand, emphasises the advantages it brought to women in the domestic domain, which was the centre of pre-monarchic Israelite society. The gendered division of labour allowed women from neighbouring households to work together and organise themselves in an 'informal social network' that assisted in the maintenance of their community (see Chapter Five). Meyers cites as examples of archaeological evidence for the division of labour based on gender, the placing of installations and equipment in the (communal court yard) for the baking of bread, identified as women's labour (see Chapter Five). This reveals that women worked together and could form an informal women's social network (Meyers 2006:248).

<sup>151</sup> Bird also limits the religious participation of women in the Israelite cult to their reproductive life (Bird 1999:7). There is little information regarding women in the public sphere of ancient Israel and, therefore, emphasising women's activities in their household shows female control and power that corresponds to male authority in the public sphere. Highlighting women's experience in the household is important. However, analogous ancient Near Eastern studies have shown that women could and did occupy positions of power outside the household and did participate in cultic activities on a social basis (Marsman 2003).

reproduction. Women occupied roles and had status in the religious and social culture of Israel. He mentions Deborah as an example of a woman officiating as a judge and prophetess. Halton suggests that the aforementioned instance may indicate broader religious involvement by women in the Israelite cult (Halton 2010:117).

#### *4.2.1.2 Outline of the sacred life of women*

The full and wide-ranging religious life of the Israelite woman inside and outside her household included oath-making, blessings and curses (cf Jdg 5:24, 31; 17:1-2), sacrificial acts (cf Jdg 13:23) and participation in sacred festive processions, rituals and cultic banquets (cf Jdg 9:27; 21:19, 23). Women worshipped the gods of the Canaanites on high places (cf Jdg 6:25). It is possible that in these religious places and their sanctuaries, women could officiate as priestesses and ritual prostitutes. Consistent with Judges 17:6 and the archaeological evidence, it was possible for women to fashion their own private religion that involved the cultic practices, beliefs and cult objects incorporated from their Canaanite neighbours as well as the Yahwistic cult. This type of religion would fall into a class of Israelite worship called 'pagan Yahwism' by Stern (2001b:20-29). Cult figurines featured prominently in this type of religion as representations of facets of the household deities (Stern 2001b:20-29).

YHWH was also worshipped in Shiloh and other places in Canaan such as Mizpah (Jdg 20:1) and Bethel (Jdg 20:18), for example. At the entrance to the Tabernacle (cf Ex 38:8; 1 Sm 2:22), women served YHWH. They probably undertook a myriad of duties including sewing, weaving and baking bread for cultic use. In their households, women managed the domestic cult where they worshipped numerous foreign gods and goddesses in addition to YHWH (cf Jdg 17:3-5). In the domestic cult, women occupied roles and gained associated status and power as they participated in a women's specific religion of divination, magic and magic rituals.

### 4.3 WORSHIPPING YHWH

The syncretic religion practised by Israelite men and women during the period of the Judges would have included the worship of YHWH and rituals pertaining to the religion. The children of Israel, familiar with the dry and barren desert, upon entering Canaan

probably admired the fertility of the coastline and the northern part of the land (see Golden 2004:18-21). This fertility the Canaanites ascribed to Baal. To be safe and secure in their new country, the children of Israel contrary to the covenant of YHWH thought it best to worship both Him and Baal (Van der Laan 2015; see Hubbard 2009:567). Idolatry had disastrous consequences for the Israelites. The Book of Judges records the Israelites' frequent oppression by the Canaanite people and their rescue from the hands of their enemies by a deliverer raised up by YHWH (cf Jdg 2; 3:1-11, 12-15; 4-5; 13).

### **4.3.1 YHWH and His covenants**

#### **4.3.1.1 The Abrahamic covenant**

The first covenant YHWH made concerning the Promised Land was at the great tree of Moreh at Shechem where Abraham built an altar as a memorial (Gn 12:6-7; see 4.4.3.1). Abraham faithfully obeyed YHWH's command to leave his country (of Ur). Accordingly, YHWH promised that He would give the land (Canaan) to Abraham and his offspring (Gn 12:7; Weinfeld 2007:252). In Genesis 15:7 after promising Abraham many offspring, YHWH vows to give Canaan to Abraham and his descendants. YHWH in Genesis 17:9, confirms His covenant with Abraham again.

He blesses (barren) Sarah too, and promises that she would be the one through whom YHWH would provide Abraham with descendants. Through His miraculous intervention in Sarah's reproductive life (by making sterile Sarah, fertile in her old age), YHWH would keep the covenant He had made with Abraham. It was through both Sarah and Abraham that YHWH secured the future of Abraham's people. Thus, both genders had a vital role to play in the fulfillment of the covenant between YHWH and Abraham.

YHWH also vowed that according to the terms of the covenant that He would be their God and they would His people. Weinfeld (2007:252) comments that YHWH's promise of the land to Abraham was unconditional and could not be broken even if the people sinned against Him (Lv 26:43). Barton and Muddiman (eds) (2001:51) observes that the Abrahamic covenant was free and absolute unlike the Mosaic covenant.

#### **4.3.1.2 The Mosaic covenant**

Unlike the Abrahamic covenant, the Mosaic covenant was a conditional agreement between YHWH and the people. YHWH could only bless the people if they followed His laws. Kohler and Hirsch (1906) comment that ‘by redeeming Israel from Egyptian bondage God has acquired his kingdom of priests and a holy nation’ (cf Barrick 1999:213). Moreover, ‘the wonderful manifestations of divine power at the Red Sea proclaim God the Ruler forever’ and naturally King over the children of Israel (Kohler & Hirsch 1906).

The law as set out in Exodus, Deuteronomy, Leviticus and Numbers is ‘the terms of the solemn agreement or “covenant” made between YHWH and the people through the mediation of Moses’ (Ex 19-24 24:24; Barton & Muddiman 2001:8). ‘At Sinai, the covenant reinforced the worship of Yahweh’ and thus loyalty to and worship of YHWH alone (Barrick 1999:221). Under His rule (theocracy), the covenant, ‘a unique arrangement in the ancient world’ (see also 2.3.3; Fruchtenbaum 2007:11; cf Meyers 1978:92), YHWH set down the rules and principles which governed the (religious and social) behaviour of His people (Barton & Muddiman 2001:8).

Thus, the existence of the children of Israel was firmly determined by their loyalty to their one God and their obedience to His covenantal laws (cf 2.2; 4.3.1; Ex 20:3; Dt 5:7; Alter 2013:9; cf Cundall & Morris 2011:84-85).

#### a. The covenant confirmed

Prior to their entry into Canaan, the Israelite tribes reconfirmed – the primary covenantal principle – YHWH’s Kingship over the children of Israel and their faithfulness to Him alone (Jos 24:14-27; Barrick 1999:213). Selected by YHWH to be His people, under the covenant He promised them ‘blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience’ (Barrick 1999:213; cf 4.3.1).<sup>152</sup> Joshua 24:14-27 expresses ‘what the ideal Israelite polity should be’ Elazar ([sa]).

In this ‘biblical utopia’ (Elazar ([sa]a; [sa]b), YHWH intended that the children of Israel flourish under his Kingship and be an illustration of the covenant’s divinely authoritative rules (the ten commandments and supplemental laws) that specified justice and uprightness (Barrick 1999:213).

The uniqueness of the covenant is expressed in YHWH’s emphasis on the high

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<sup>152</sup> Barrick (1999:213-233) discusses the Mosaic covenant.

value of human life (Barton & Muddiman 2001:8). In this covenantal context, men and women obtained equality in terms of their roles and associated authority as well as their worth in the household and society. Women had a significant role to play during YHWH's leadership and they too would flourish alongside the men. Women too could be His vessels to lead and teach the people and guide them to uphold His laws (cf Jdg 4:4-5). In my opinion, YHWH perceived women just as valuable, and loved them equally to men. YHWH considered women to be just as intellectually and spiritually capable as men to uphold His laws and worship Him.

According to Le Roux (2015:503-521; 2016:501-526), women (non-ideal bodies) received treatment similar to men and could obtain high positions notwithstanding the prevalent cultural ideology during the pre-monarchic period. An in-depth study of the Book of Judges shows that contrary to the belief of women's inferior status in the worldview of the dominant cultural ideology (patriarchy in the ancient Near East), YHWH intended women to be equal to men under His rule and in the covenantal relationship. Although both genders had different roles (as mothers and daughters, fathers and sons) in their household, men and women could be YHWH's representatives as prophets(esses), judges and leaders (Jdg 4:4-5). Consequently, in His name the prophets (women and men), priests as well as the judges (men and women) in the pre-monarchic period exercised authority (Kohler & Hirsch 1906)

Abuse and discrimination against women, however, did occur during the theocratic rule of YHWH (cf Jdg 11:34-39; 19-21), but I believe that this probably was the result of men's failure to uphold the covenantal principles and its favourable and loving perception of the value and equality of women and men.

Consequently, the roles of non-Israelite women such as Achsah (a Kenizzite) and Jael (a Kenite) and Israelites such as Deborah and Manoah's wife as portrayed in the Book of Judges are remarkable and astonishing (Le Roux 2015:503-521; 2016:501-526). The women mentioned above were mostly faithful to YHWH. YHWH's ideal was for His people to follow His loving instructions and be solely loyal to Him. However, it is clear in the pages of Judges that the people chose to worship the gods of the foreign nations in Canaan (cf Jdg 2:12; 3:7; cf Le Roux 2015; 2016) – sometimes simultaneously with YHWH, the God of the Covenant who delivered them from Egypt.

Barton and Muddiman (2001:9) relate that ‘covenant and redemption’ is the fundamental theme in much of the Old Testament. This is more visible in the Book of Judges. The frequent acts of apostasy committed by the Israelite tribes by which they ‘fell from covenantal faithfulness’ (Niditch 2008:49; see 2.3) had disastrous consequences. YHWH would then raise up a judge, but the people would not listen to him (or her) and serve other gods (Jdg 2:16). Niditch (2008:49) asserts the following: ‘Infidelity to God leads to defeat’. In other words, idolatry leads the people into defeat in battle. Thus, the people’s covenantal allegiance to YHWH was sorely tested by the Canaanite nations (cf Jdg 2:22; 3:4; Niditch 2008:49). The Book of Judges records the people consistently failing the test (cf Jdg 2:10-19; 3:7; 4:1; 6:1; 8:33). I believe that while women experienced their lived reality in a benevolent form of patriarchy (see Chapter Two), it was the deterioration of covenantal principles that led to women’s subjugation and abuse (cf Jdg 19-21). Webb (2012:216-217) observes that:

...abuse of women [unless that is taken to include any form of male headship] is viewed as abhorrent in Judges and associated with idolatry and apostasy. It is something that happens when Israel moves away from faithfulness to YHWH and descends into moral and religious chaos.

In light of the above statement, it is my opinion that while the covenantal principles were upheld by the people, male rule was favourable towards women and supported women’s roles and status and concomitant authority in the community. As the Israelites began to worship within the Canaanite cult, even more opportunities in the cult sprang up for women, affording them more status and additional roles. However, participation in the Canaanite cult was not YHWH’s ideal for them. A paradox certainly occurred in the worship of the Canaanite deities. While the hybrid religion might have given women certain status and authority, it also led to the erosion of the covenantal principles and the Israelites’ special relationship with YHWH (cf Jdg 11:34-39; 17:1-4; 19-21). Niditch (2008:49) observes that ‘polytheism and idolatry are the rubrics under which Israel’s sins fall’.

#### **4.3.2 The Tabernacle at Shiloh**

The sacred structure was portable and women participated in the construction of the Tabernacle (Ex 35:25-26; 36:7) and, as mentioned above, possibly also at the other places

of worship indicated in Judges: at Mizpeh (Jdg 21:11), at Gilgal (1 Sm 11:15), at Hebron (2 Sm 5:3), at Bethel, and at Bochim (Jdg 3:5; 21:4, cf 4.4.5).<sup>153</sup> The Tabernacle at Shiloh was the religious meeting place between YHWH and His people (see Kalimi 2005:146; Chyutin 2006:39-40; Hatten & Adams 2011:67). YHWH could manifest His presence at the Tabernacle in Shiloh to the women and men or wherever the Ark of the Covenant was present since the latter was where the glory of God dwelled (1 Sm 2:8; see Warner 1976:65; Kaiser 2011:62; cf Dowley 2003:11; Cline 2012:218). Abrahams (2007:419) describes the Tabernacle at Shiloh as an edifice constructed of gold, bronze, silver, acacia wood, ‘violet (*tekhelet*), purple, and scarlet stuff; ordinary linen and fine twisted linen (cf Ex 25:3-5; see also Strong 2003:22); goats’ hair, tanned rams’ skins, and goatskins; oil [for lighting and for anointing]; spices [for the incense and for the anointing oil (see also Strong 2003:66)]; and precious stones [for the ephod and the breastpiece, cf Ex 28:6]’. The men and women encouraged by the Tabernacle as a sign of YHWH’s divine presence and favour, would have enjoyed its peculiar beauty as they worshipped their God.

#### 4.3.2.1 *The layout of the Tabernacle*

Harris (2011:117) relates that the portable Tabernacle was the blueprint for Solomon’s temple in Jerusalem. The Tabernacle compound comprised the Tabernacle proper that was covered by a roof made of layers of carpets and an outer courtyard measuring 150 by 75 feet. A lofty 7-foot high fence of linen draperies supported by pillars enclosed the entire complex (Harris 2011:117). According to Harris’s (2011:117) description of the layout of the Tabernacle, a woman could enter through one gate, placed to the east.

Inside the compound, a new mother (cf 4.3.2.4) faced the brazen altar where her sacrifices were presented to the priests who made amends for her sins and interceded on her behalf in the Tabernacle (Harris 2011:117-123). At the entrance of the Tabernacle was the bronze laver for priestly purification. Peering inside the Tabernacle, women observed its beauty to consist of the Holy Place where the lampstand (*menorah*), the table for the showbread and the incense altar stood. The second chamber was the Holy of Holies (Harris 2011:117-123). It was concealed behind a heavy curtain (the veil) and created of fine linen

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<sup>153</sup> It was not uncommon for women to participate in ancient Mesopotamian and Egyptian building projects (Marsman 2003:407; cf Neh. 3:12).



and purple, scarlet and blue yarn ‘the violet, purple, and scarlet stuff’ referred to by Abrahams (2007:418-421; cf Exodus 35:25-26). The embroidered drape hid this most sacred space – the precise manifestation of the Deity – from the women and men. Only the High priest could enter the holy place once every year on the Day of Atonement.

#### 4.3.2.2 *The Ark of the Covenant*

The Ark of the Covenant was a gold-covered wooden box with the atonement cover (the mercy seat) atop (see Figure 4.1; Harris 2011:117-123). The unique article symbolised God’s throne and contained a golden container that held a jar of manna (Ex 16:32), Aaron’s budding staff (Nm 17:10) and the two stone tablets upon which were inscribed the ten commandments (Ex 35-40; Friedman 1980:241-248; Abrahams 2007:418-421; Harris 2011:117-123). The Ark of the Covenant presented YHWH’s presence and men and women would have derived a sense of security and well-being from its placement in the Tabernacle at Shiloh or wherever it was housed since it played a significant role in the conquest of Canaan (Wagner 1976: 66,70).

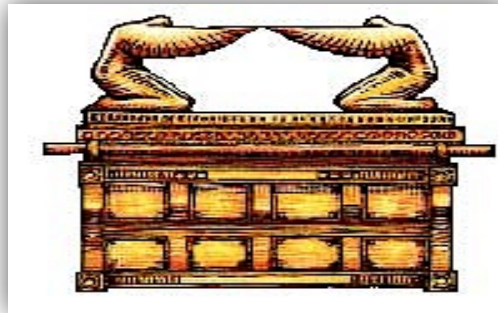


Figure 4.1 Artist’s rendition of the Ark of the Covenant (<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-ark-of-the-covenant>)

#### 4.3.2.3 *Votive offerings at the Tabernacle*

Stripling (2016:89-94) reports on the archaeological search for the location of the Tabernacle at Shiloh. Mizrachi and Veeder (2016:9) comment that due to a lack of archaeological evidence, it cannot be determined that Shiloh served as a cultic centre. However, cultic activity at Shiloh is indicated by the discovery of clay vessels, incense stands, votive bowls and anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figurines from the Middle Bronze to the Iron Age at the site (Stripling 2016:89, 92; cf Bunimovitz & Finkelstein

1993:81-196; Zevit 2001:108). According to Stripling (2016:89, 93), ‘further excavation and analysis’ of the bones discovered at Shiloh (cf Macdonald 2008:152; see also Smith 2014:29) may be indicative of the ‘Israelite sacrificial system’. In addition, the discovery of a horned altar (Zwickel 2010:404, Smith 2014:29; Stripling 2016:91) also demonstrates cultic activity at Shiloh (see also Ben-Gedalyahu 2013b; Avraham 2013).

King and Stager (2001:352-353) include anthropomorphic figurines as supplicatory offerings among the large quantity of ‘votive figurines’ discovered in Israel (cf Richard 2003:372). These figurines included theriomorphic, and ‘nonzoomorphic’ figurines made of metal, stone or clay. Women naturally would have been among the supplicants, presenting their vowed statuettes at Shiloh. However, it is more likely that only (earthenware) vessels such as the ceramic vessels that were unearthed at Hazor, el-Qom, Arad, Tel Sheva and Kuntillet ‘Ajrud (King & Stager 2001:353) would have been acceptable as votives at the Tabernacle at Shiloh.

#### *4.3.2.4 The purification rite after childbirth*

As part of the compulsory purification ritual after childbirth, new mothers such as the mother of Samson (Jdg 13 and 14) most probably offered a year-old lamb to complete the sacred cleansing rite as indicated in Leviticus 12:1-8. Presumably the lamb, like the animals sacrificed as burnt offerings, had to be healthy and ‘without a defect’. If the mother of the child was poor, the lamb could be substituted for two doves or two pigeons (Lv 12:1-8).

The new mother led the lamb to the (north side of the) burnt offering altar at the entrance of the Tabernacle. The narrative in Leviticus 12 does not go into detail, but it was probably the same as the method of animal sacrifice in Leviticus 1:1-17 as well as 1 Sm 1:25 which makes Ackerman (2016) believe that Hannah ‘joined with her husband in slaughtering ... the sacrificial bull.’ There is also the fact that Manoah’s wife was present when he made a sacrifice to the Angel of the Lord in Judges 13.

The following may be inferred for a new mother who might have slaughtered the sacrificial lamb herself. The woman may have presented the animal at the entrance to the Tabernacle (where women did assemble, Lv 1:3). She might have laid her hands on the head of the yearling as an act of atonement (Lv 1:4; see Witherington 1999:8). She may have slaughtered the animal, skinned it and cut it into separate pieces, and washed the inner

parts and the legs with water (Lv 1:5-6, 9). It was the priests' duty to sprinkle the blood of the sacrificed animal on the four sides of the altar at the entrance of the Tabernacle and prepare a fire on the altar to burn the head and the fat first and then the rest of the animal (Lv 1: 5, 7-9). In cases of bird sacrifices, the woman only had to offer it to the priest, who killed it and burnt it on the altar (Lv 1:14-15).

Edersheim (1889), in a depiction of sacrifice at the Temple in Jerusalem, states that 'women might bring their sacrifices into the Great Court, but they might not perform the second rite – of laying on of hands'. More recently Bird (1999:3-20) comments that women were excluded from slaughtering and offering animal sacrifices since this cultic rite belonged in the public domain – the sphere of men (cf Wegner 1998:40-48; 2003:451-465; Best 2005:175; Ruane 2013:37-39).

Braulik (1999:909-942), on the other hand, has concluded that both men and women could carry out the liturgical rites (cf Meyers 2017:1-20). Moreover, if women were the head of the family (as the mother of Micah appears to be in Judges 17:1-4), they would have been able to offer an animal sacrifice (Braulik 1999:909-942; cf Peritz 1898:111-148). I believe that since under YHWH's covenantal rule women were allowed equal rights as men, it seems possible that they might have participated in animal sacrifices and offerings (see Whitherington 1999:7-8) in their households.

#### 4.3.2.5 *Women presenting sin offerings to YHWH*

Women were also obligated to present animals as sin offerings<sup>154</sup> (as part of the childbirth purification ritual) to the priests at the Tabernacle (De Vaux 1997:460; cf Wegner 1998:44). Private offerings by women might have included freewill offerings or an offering of thanks. Offerings made by women in addition to animals and birds consisted of a variety of leavened and unleavened cakes (Lv 7:12-13; 24:5), perfume, oil and incense (Lv 24:2, 7), drink offerings of wine and grain (in the form of flour), and possibly vegetables and

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<sup>154</sup> The purification rites for women were also combined with a sin offering of a dove or a pigeon or two doves or two pigeons if poor, according to Leviticus 12:6, 8. The guilt offering and jealousy offering also fall into this group (Hirsch et al 1906; cf Lane 2010:76, 80; Douglas & Tenney 2011g; Edwards 2012:26-27, 33). The jealousy offering in Numbers 5:15 is a grain offering consisting of a tenth of an ephah (about two liters) of barley flour. The grain offering is a symbolic admission of the man's jealousy and guilt (should the wife be found innocent of her husband's accusation of infidelity). The focus of these texts is often on the woman. However, the husband shares in her public disgrace and his own in exposing his sin of jealousy. Who knows what their marital relationship would have been like after this unfortunate occasion.

ceramic vessels.<sup>155</sup> Libations were compulsory for all burnt offerings (lambs, young bulls, rams) and peace offerings in the honouring of vows or as freewill offerings or festival offerings (Nm 15:3-10). Consequently, women presented a litre of wine together with their offering of a lamb (Leithart 1991).

#### 4.3.2.6 *Sacrifices at the fulfillment of the Nazirite vow*

A woman (or a man) who made the Nazirite vow (see 4.3.3) at the culmination of her separation from the world and family<sup>156</sup> brought four categories of offerings to end her time of service to YHWH (Nm 6:1-8). First an unblemished year-old male lamb as a burnt offering, followed by a flawless year-old ewe lamb as a sin offering, a spotless ram as a fellowship offering in addition to grain offerings including a basket of unleavened bread and drink offerings (Nm 6:13-15). Provisions for oblations in a fulfilled vow were quite a costly task, funded frequently by wealthy people in cases of poor Nazirites (Hunt 2006).

The dedication of a woman's hair to God was a sign that she had undertaken the Nazirite vow. Women (and men) dedicated their hair to God by leaving it uncut for the duration of the pledge. Long hair was an outward symbol of the Nazirite. The hair was cut at the fulfillment of the vow and presented as a sacrifice to God (Barton & Blau 1906; Walton, Matthew & Chavalas 2000c:146; Sprinkle 2015). Hunt (2006) comments that long hair symbolised a woman's 'separation to God' or consecration to God who was her physical and spiritual strength. Leaving her hair uncut permitted the Divine authority to flow through her as well as act in her. At the same time, it signified her trust in God (cf Jdg 13:5-7, 14; 16:17; Hunt 2006; cf Damazio 1988:148). The ordinary woman's authority was re-affirmed by God during the Nazirite vow, of which her long hair was an outward sign.

Numbers 6:18 reveals that the consecrated hair was shaved off and placed into the fire made for the sacrifice of the fellowship offering so that it may not be 'deconsecrated' (Milgrom 2007b:46). Presumably, a woman's hair was cut rather than shorn off

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<sup>155</sup> Snaith (1957:308-317) discusses three types of sacrifices and offerings made.

<sup>156</sup> The Nazirite vow involved separation from corpses as well. Any contact with the dead required a purification ritual that was 7 days long. On the 7<sup>th</sup> day the Nazirite's hair was shorn off and a sin offering and burnt offerings in the form of pigeons or doves were made together with a year-old lamb as a guilt offering. Her hair was re-consecrated, and her vow repeated. The 7 days of her defilement was not considered as part of the period of consecration (Nm 6:9-12).

completely.<sup>157</sup> The Nazirite and her household and circle of friends thereafter enjoyed the unleavened bread and meat left over from the sacrifices in a joyous celebration (Hunt 2006).

It appears that in following the conditions of the Nazirite vow, women (see 4.3.3) could play an important role in emphasising YHWH's contempt of the popular cults. Walton and Matthews (2000:182) note that the injunctions against ingesting any grape products, cutting of the hair and contact with corpses within the Nazirite vow were features that embodied the primary popular cultic concepts of fertility, 'sympathetic magic' as well as the 'cult of the dead'. These were cultic rituals that YHWH sought to eliminate from among the women and men. In this way, the ordinary woman in Iron Age I could become YHWH's emissary and present a visible sign of His disapproval of the popular cults (Walton & Matthews 2000:182; cf Walton, Matthews & Chavalas 2000c:146). Samson's mother, it appears, might have been, in this manner, an emissary of YHWH (Jdg 13).

#### *4.3.2.7 Women's religious responsibilities at the Tabernacle in Shiloh*

##### *a. Service at entrance of Tabernacle*

Though attendance for women at the annual pilgrimage festivals was optional, their services were required in cultic routines (1 Sm 2:22; Oppenheimer 2009; Breyfogle 1910:414-416; cf Bird 1999:10-20; Witherington 1999:6-9; cf Meyers 2017:1-20). Women assembled and served at the entrance of the Tabernacle. Noteworthy is that an important vessel for priestly ablution and purification, the laver and its stand, were made from the bronze in the mirrors of the women who served at the entrance of the Tabernacle (see Figure 4.2; Ex 38:8). Barnes comments that the women 'voluntarily gave up these articles of luxury' (Barnes 1870f; see also Sallie 2003:70; Stuart 2006:767; Schwartz & Kaplan

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<sup>157</sup> A 9<sup>th</sup> century BC Phoenician inscription relates that a person made the consecration of shaven hair in completion of a pledge to the goddess Astarte. Hair and blood represented an individual's life force and were two important cultic materials in ancient Near Eastern 'sympathetic magic'. Along with their prophecies, seers sent a lock of their hair to the ruler of Mari. These locks of hair were used in forecasting rites in order to confirm prophecies (Lv 19:27). The custom of hair cutting in the Nazirite vow shared one similarity with practices of hair cutting in the ancient Near Eastern cultures. It symbolised re-emergence into society. Divergences were that a Nazirite's consecrated hair was uncut and not shorn off, and at the end of the vow period, the shorn hair was burnt instead of deposited in a temple (Walton & Matthews 2000:182; see also Cartledge 1992:18-23).

2007:60-61).<sup>158</sup> ‘The gifts and skills of women played a significant part in the development of the tabernacle’ (Phillips 2002:46; Schwartz & Kaplan 2007:60; cf Antonelli 2004:225; George 2009:118). Patterson and Kelley (eds) (2011:202) report that the women’s mirrors were of ‘Egyptian design’. The mirrors were made of a ‘gold-colored, typically round circle of metal with a bronze handle’ and were ‘polished to produce a reflection’. An abundance of these mirrors ‘used in Egypt’ have been uncovered by archaeologists (Patterson & Kelley [eds] 2011:202).

Scholars are uncertain of the kind of service the women at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting performed (Walton, Matthews & Chavalas 2000e:119; Antonelli 2004:225-226; Stuart 2006:767-768). The idea that the women’s service may have taken the form of cloth weaving, treating hides with tanning processes or merely cleaning cannot be discounted (cf Stuart 2006:767-768). Still, these types of ‘humble’ roles and tasks were very necessary to ensure the smooth running of the Tabernacle.

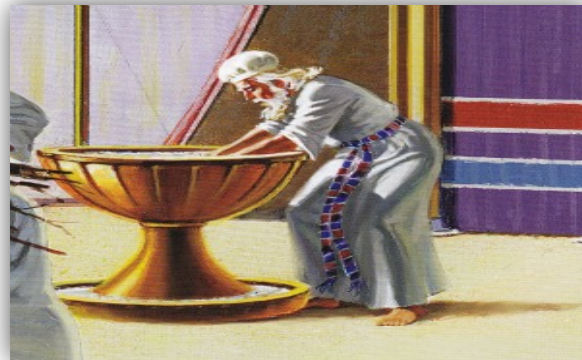


Figure 4.2 Brazen laver – artist’s impression (<https://graceandtruth.me/2015/07/16/jesus-and-the-brazen-laver/>)

The women workers required by the Tabernacle were perhaps not on the same scale as the employees of the larger and grander Mesopotamian temples (Marsman 2003:491), but their skills and labour were much needed. Women, as part of a labour force, were expected to carry out tasks associated with culinary and housekeeping purposes. Their domestic tasks were extended into the sacred service of the community (see Sallie

<sup>158</sup> A definite shape for the laver in Exodus 38:8 is not known, but it most likely resembled vases depicted in Assyrian bas-reliefs. Therefore, it was probably shaped like an urn or vase that was positioned on a slim column extending from a base (Ellicott 2015).

2003:71). It stands to reason, therefore, that the authority they acquired in their households would have been transferred into their religious tasks as well.

The transference of women and their specific responsibilities into the cult would have been a natural way of life, particularly if the people were intent on following YHWH and accepting His covenantal rule. It is likely that cultic duties at the Tabernacle were performed by the women belonging to the Levite clan, living by or close to the Tabernacle (Bird 1999:10). Sanctified by their association with the priests for whom they worked, the women could gain access to the sanctuary (Bird 1999:10). Perhaps they could gain access to the sanctuary of YHWH at Shechem (cf Gottwald 1999:563-567) as well as the other temples at Dan (Laish, in Judges 18:27-31), Bethel (1 Samuel 10:3), Gilgal and Mizpah (1 Sm 7:16), the cultic compound at Hebron (2 Sm 2:4; 15:7) and in Bethlehem (1 Sm 20:6).

Consequently, the women at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting in Exodus 38:8 were probably also made up of Kohathite, Gershonite and Merarite (the three clans of Levi in Numbers 3:17, 21-37). The women from the Kohathite clan might have been women who occupied certain roles, status and authority as they were part of the kinfolk that assisted the Aaronic priests in the manner mentioned above (Bramer 2016). Bramer (2016) comments that the Levites were unequivocally allowed to approach the Tabernacle. This was an inimitable privilege set above all their other duties. Such an honour would have imparted a certain status on the Kohathite women which set them apart from the men and women in the Israelite society (cf Nu 16:9-10; Bramer 2016).

Milgrom believes the Levites performed only physical tasks – that is non-cultic tasks – and cites Number 18:3 as an indication that they were forbidden from rendering ritual (liturgical) services at all (Milgrom 1983:18-19; cf Greenstein 2000:165-166; Stuart 2006:767).

On the other hand, the Hebrew verb *tsaba* in Exodus 38:8 is translated as ‘serve at [a] sacred tent’ (Nm 4:23; 8:24; 1 Sm 2:22; Brown et al 2006b; Mansfield 2011:7-8). 1 Samuel 2:22 indicates that the women serving at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting occupied a continuing service in the pre-monarchic era, which may be considered cultic for this reason (Everhart 2004:45; Mansfield 2011:6).

The specific nature of these cultic activities, however, cannot be pinpointed (Greenstein 2000:166; cf Gruber 2013:85). Mansfield and Peritz suggest it might have been

in a Levitical capacity (Peritz 1898:145; Mansfield 2011:8; cf Ackerman 2010:539; cf Faulkes 2011:49-50). It appears that much cultic activity occurred at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting (in which the women might have been involved). Mansfield observes the sacrificial altar and bronze laver were located near the entrance (Ex 30:18-19). There individual petitions and pledges as well as sacrificial offerings were presented (1 Sm 1:9-10); the people assembled at the door (Lv 8:4), and rituals connected to the Nazirite vow were also performed here (Nm 6:10, Mansfield 2011:5; cf Cooper & Goldstein 1997:202-203). It stands to reason that the women would have occupied roles needed to assist the people with their spiritual and physical needs (cf 1 Sam 2:22).

Bramer (2016) notes that one of the important duties of the Levites and Levitical priesthood was to teach the Israelites the law (Dt 33:10). The Levite women may have been involved in instruction of the Israelite law. Nelson (2007) remarks that the Levites were gatekeepers and in control of chambers and the treasury of the temple (1 Chr 9:26), duties they probably performed at the Tabernacle.

Therefore, the women might also have functioned as gatekeepers, compiling inventory of materials in addition to occupying roles as musicians, officials and judges as part of the assistance given to the priests (1 Chr 23:4-5; Bramer 2015).

Despite the low value placed on women's religious activities at the Tent of Meeting by scholars (Peritz 1889:146), their prayers, intercession and offerings as well as the cultic behaviour of the women who followed after them are very 'significant in the religious life of mankind' (Lockyer 1967:20). The pious prayers of Hannah, for example, 'purified and [re] vitalized the religious life of the entire Jewish nation'. Hannah's prayers, in all probability, came at a time when the people needed divine intervention and required a prophet such as Samuel, a spokesman of YHWH and Hannah's son (Lockyer 1967:20). preceded

#### b. Baking of bread

The grinding of grain (barley and wheat), considered as demeaning to men (Jdg 16:21; Lm 5:13; cf Van der Toorn 1986:249), was a woman's work. This they did overnight when the necessary quantities of flour were ground in preparation for the baking of the bread the following morning (Pr 31:15; cf Jdg 9:53; Lockyer 1967:19). The 12 loaves of showbread



in Leviticus 24:5 were baked every Sabbath by the Kohathite (women) to whom the task was assigned (Nm 3:31; cf 1 Sm 8:13). Could the ovens unearthed at Shiloh have been used to accomplish this job (Ginzberg et al 1906; King 1993:107-108; cf Ben-Gedalyahu 2013b)?

The sacred bread was probably unleavened. It appears that information regarding the preparations was a closely kept secret by the sons of the Kohathites who were in charge of the baking (cf 1 Chr 9:32; Jacobs & Hirsch 1906).<sup>159</sup> However, it was possibly the women who actually prepared and baked the bread (see Footnote 159). This closely guarded secret would have firmly entrenched this particular women's role and attendant value and worth of the women in the pre-monarchic community. The (women) bakers would have deliberately rejected raisins as an ingredient in the recipe (Walton & Matthews 2000:182).<sup>160</sup> Dates and figs too would have been excluded from the preparation process for these were used in the baking of sweet cakes for the gods and goddesses of the Canaanites whom YHWH abhorred (Jr 7:18; 44:19; cf Hs 3:1; Breyfogle 1910:406; Walton, Matthews & Chavalas 2000a:753). A parallel for women bakers, albeit in non-cultic context, is found in the ancient Near East. Women as bakers are mentioned in the Ugaritic texts (Kitchen 2003:95; Marsman 2003:436).

### c. Providing water, spices, oil

It was the responsibility of women to draw water, and the water for the laver was presumably brought there in an urn carried on the head by women (Lockyer 1967:18; Marsman 2003:436, 528). Also ascribed to the Kohathite clan was the blending of spices and oil and the making of the anointing oil (Ex 30:23-29; Nm 3:31). This assignment required skilled perfumers and thus fell into the hands of women (Ex 30:25; cf 1 Sm 8:13; Blenkinsopp 1997:57).

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<sup>159</sup> Jacobs and Hirsch (1906), in accordance with Rabbinical literature, relate that the men of the Kohathite clan baked the bread. However, the preparations were done either in the temple courtyard or in an area close to the Tabernacle as some scholars have proposed (Jacobs & Hirsch 1906) and therefore near the place where the women in Exodus 38:8 assembled. Because the process included the grinding of grain, it was likely Kohathite women who were the bakers. Marsman (2003:436) notes baking bread was generally the task of women in ancient Israel. It was also considered demeaning for men to grind grain, which increases the probability of women as the bakers of the sacred bread.

<sup>160</sup> The raisin cakes 'were made of dried compressed grapes...a rare delicacy in the Israelites' diet... they were also a part of the fertility ritual in the worship of the false god Baal' (Rainer & Rainer 2009:129).

In the ancient Near Eastern, female perfume makers are mentioned in texts dated to the Middle Assyrian epoch (circa 1392-1056 BC) in neo-Babylonian temple records as well as Neo Assyrian documents where women perfume makers served within the cultic setting at the palace in Nineveh. Women were also employed as perfumers at the royal palaces in Mari circa 1000 BC (Cousin 2013). The anointing oil in Exodus 30:24 was an olive-based perfume, the use of which was not only popular in the ordinary life of Israelites, but also in the cultic rituals as well (Rubin 2005; Milgrom 2007a:178). Perfume containers were unearthed at Ugarit in the form of zoomorphic rhytons (Cousin 2013). Bottles and vials that once contained fragrant substances, dating back to 3000 BC, have also been discovered all over the Near East and at Israelite burial sites (Rubin 2005; Burke 2011:902).

#### d. Cooking duties

Women working in the service of the Tabernacle may also have performed the duties of cooks (1 Sm 8:13). The reference to golden plates, bowls, cups, dishes, pans and pitchers (Ex 25:29; 37:16) may point towards additional food and drink, possibly strong drink<sup>161</sup> being consumed.<sup>162</sup> 'The preparation of cultic meals or foods used in rituals at the Tabernacle would naturally be a woman's task' (Bird 1999:10).

#### e. Weaving and cleaning activities

Seamstresses would sew priestly vestments and women would serve as weavers of fabric<sup>163</sup> to preserve the heavy drapes in the Tabernacle proper, for example (Abrahams 2007:419). The production of other textiles (perhaps rugs and blankets for the priests' personal use)

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<sup>161</sup> Tithes (made up of cattle or sheep, grain, wine and oil) were exchanged for silver by those who lived too far from the Tabernacle at Shiloh. With the money, cattle, sheep, wine or other fermented drink could be purchased in Shiloh (Dt 14:22-26). Fermented drink was to be offered with the twice-daily sacrifice of lambs, if a household could afford it, naturally (Nm 28:7).

<sup>162</sup> Archaeologists have discovered *mizraq* metal bowls or ritual vessels used for religious oblations and for drinking in the ancient Near East dated to the Iron Age in ancient Israel. Shaped with 'convex omphalos bases', fluted sides and flaring rims, they were made with silver, gold or bronze and frequently decorated. These archaeological finds include 'Assyrian style' and 'Phoenician style' cultic bowls. A *mizraq* in the same style has been uncovered at an Israelite cultic centre at Tel Dan (Greer 2010:31-33).

<sup>163</sup> As a gender-specific job, weaving has a long history of generally being assigned to women, both in a cultic and secular context in the ancient Near East as well as in ancient Israel. Women assisted in the weaving of the drapes for the Tabernacle. Archaeological evidence includes women as weavers (see Chapter Five) depicted in a cultic setting on a shell plate from the Dagan sanctuary in Mari (Chavalas 2014:19). Women involved in the making of textiles for the cult are mentioned in Late Babylonian records as well as in ancient Egyptian documents (Marsman 2003:408).

would also be in demand (Marsman 2003:436). Women would also be needed to clean vessels used in rituals as well as the furniture and probably the quarters of the priest. As Kohathite women, they were set apart for special services to the priests and thus could handle the sacred objects in the Tabernacle (Bramer 2016). These chores are reflections of women's only duties in their households which were transferred into the cultic service at the Tabernacle. These (sacred) tasks would have made women indispensable in the Israelite religion.

#### *4.3.2.8 Additional duties performed by women at the Tabernacle*

##### *a. Music making*

Scholars have proposed the women at the Tent of Meeting to be involved 'in some kind of ritual music making' (Ackerman 2010:539; see 4.3.2.8 a). Music, dance and song were an integral part of ancient Israelite religious and secular existence. Women's participation in musical activities is evident in much of the hundreds of artefacts of musical instruments, figurines and plaques representing musicians and dancers from the Bronze Age to the Byzantine era, found in ancient Israel and the Near East. These artefacts include terracotta figurines 'of women hand drum players' (Ellis Smith 2012:1772; cf King & Stager 2001:285-298).

Marsman (2003:616) observes that 'Israelite women probably acted as cultic singers, musicians and dancers in the pre-monarchic period'. She bases her observation on Psalm 68:25-28 and cites Judges 21:23 as a good indication of women dancing in a cultic festival (Marsman 2003:616). Musical instruments were played, including frame drums, lutes (1 Sm 18:6) and presumably other instruments (lyre, cymbals), by women in groups or in 'mixed ensembles' (Meyers 1991:17-18; 1997b:70) at cultic ceremonies. Archaeological evidence and Biblical texts indicate that women favoured playing the frame drum (see Figure 4.3a).



Figure 4.3a Modern Arab women playing the frame drum (photo: Halima Sha)



Figure 4.3b Woman frame drummer from Shikmona (the northern coast of Israel) circa 1000 BC  
(<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/426997608396178143/>)

Meyers (1997b:70; cf Meyers 1991:16-27) has accordingly identified the frame drum as a musical instrument played by women alone. She finds evidence for this theory in the terracotta statuettes from Cyprus of women playing the frame drum<sup>164</sup> as well as an Egyptian stela of Ramses II (1300-1234 BC) from Abydos that shows two women playing the hand drum.<sup>165</sup> ‘Biblical indications include Miriam drumming and leading the women in dancing’ (Meyers 1997b:70; cf Meyers 1991:16-27). To this list of evidence may be

<sup>164</sup> Ellis Smith notes that ‘Israelite terracottas of women playing the hand drum, may serve as models for Cypriot ones’ (Ellis Smith 2012:1772; see Burgh [sa]).

<sup>165</sup> Other archaeological artefacts are Egyptian mural art and representations on Phoenician, Cypriot and Mesopotamian ivory and metal vessels. These materials show music-makers performing on a wide variety of musical instruments consisting of percussion, wind and string instruments (cf Meyers 1991:24; King & Stager 2001:292-298). Almost all of these depict female frame drum players. Furthermore, Anath the Canaanite goddess is associated with a hand drum in an ancient text. All of these are evidence that points to the frame drum as a women’s specific musical instrument in the Mediterranean, in ancient Palestine and the ancient Near East (Meyers 2009b; see Figure 4.3b). Of the musicians who played the frame drum, many were the priestesses of the numerous deities. The goddess Inanna was believed to be the creator of the frame drum. The earliest known drummer in history was Lipushiau the En of the Enkisinugal temple in Ur (ca 2300 BC). She is referred to as playing the *balag-di* drum (a small circular frame drum) by hand (Redmond 2000:427).

added the daughter of Jephthah dancing to the sound of frame drums (probably played by women), as mentioned in Judges 11:34 (cf 1 Sm 18:6; Ps 68:25).

#### b. Singing

Song and dance often accompanied the music-playing women. Women sang songs for example in honour and celebration of God's victory over the enemy (Ex 15:20; Jdg 5; 11:34; 1 Sm 18:6-7, Burgh [sa]; cf Meyers 1991:23). Deborah's victory song of praise in Judges 5 may have been sung acapella, but this is doubtful given the tradition of 'drum-song-dance' (Delcamp 2013:7; cf Meyers 1991:25).

#### c. Dancing

In the ancient Near East, the frame drum was 'a sacred instrument used as a rhythmic support' for the singing and chanting of hymns and liturgies (see Figure 4.3a, b; Redmond 2000:427). The 'round dance' (*mēhōlōt*) was a form of cultic praise performed frequently by women (Ex 15:20; Jdg 11:34). This was probably also the dance the girls performed at the celebration in the Shiloh vineyard in Judges 21:21 (a ritual 'hopping' dance was danced by the Baal prophets in 1 Kings 18:26 [King & Stager 2001:298-299; cf DeVries 1997a:80; cf 4.4.4.9; 4.4.5], which might indicate the type of cultic dances people performed in the pre-monarchic period).

#### d. Composing poetry

Women such as Deborah (Jdg 5) and Hannah (1 Sm 2:1-10) were also poets who composed eloquent sacred verse (Meyers 2013:1760).<sup>166</sup> Meyers comments that women were empowered and obtained authority through the power they exerted over their audience in those moments of their musical, song and dance performances. Israelite women like the temple musicians of the ancient Near Eastern gods who had rigorous training for years probably underwent training to play musical instruments as well. Like those priestesses,

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<sup>166</sup> Millgram (2008:238) notes that 'with a documented long-standing tradition of female literacy in the ancient Near East, and a tradition of female authorship we should not be surprised that, as a part of the ancient Near East, Israel should also have its share of poetic compositions attributed to women authors'.

the women learned to choreograph and compose dance and song (Redmond 2000:427; cf Marsman 2003:552-554). ‘Gathering to rehearse, compose and perform provided women with the opportunity to experience leadership and camaraderie, as well as the esteem of their colleagues and also of their audiences’ (Meyers 2009b; 1991:25).

#### *4.3.2.9 Women as professional mourners*

Women acting as professional mourners composed and sang dirges at ‘ritualized farewells of beloved people’ (Redmond 2000:428). King and Stager observe that ‘when personal tragedies or national calamities struck, their loud lament prompted the community to participate in the mourning’ (cf Jr 9:17-19; King & Stager 2001:287). In mourning rituals, the frame drum featured notably. Woman figurines with frame drums were found in graves that were probably interred with their owners (Redmond 2000:428).

Jeremiah 9:17-19 is thought by Meyers to refer to ‘an association or professional “guild” of women lamenters who are urged in the text to teach the skill to others in their inner circle. Considering that professional mourners in the ancient Near East were primarily women and that in Egypt professional mourners consisted only of women, it can be deduced that the profession in ancient Israel was predominated by women (Meyers 2013:175).

#### **4.3.3 Sacred vows**

Covenants and vow-making (cf 4.3.1) were important customs in the Old Testament. Altars, stone platforms of worship, were markers of places of sacred vows made with YHWH (Gn 8:20 [Noah]; 12:7 [Abram]; 26:25 [Isaac]; 33:20 [Jacob]; Ex 17:15 [Moses]; Dt 27:4-7; Jos 24:14-27 [Joshua and the children of Israel]; Jdg 6:26 [Gideon]; 13:19 [Manoah and his wife]; 21:4 [the tribes]). As memorials, these sacred stones reminded women and men of YHWH’s promises, blessings and curses upon them. Women, although excluded from the priesthood (see 4.3.7 5 a, b), feature prominently in these sacred pledges YHWH made to the Israelites. From Genesis 2:15 and 3:15 to the inhabitation of the Promised Land in Judges, women were integral and dedicated to the fulfillment of these

sacred vows (Jdg 4; 13). One of YHWH's vows is directed, in a sense, specifically at women (Ex 23:26).<sup>167</sup>

Women made vows to YHWH in the 'context of prayer' and usually within 'times of danger or distress – war, journeys, illness and infertility' (see 4.3.3.1 a, b; Meyers 2017:7-8). An example of a distressing period in the history of the Israelites is referred to in Judges 13:1 where the people came under the oppressive rule of the Philistines.

A woman's (or a man's) vow to God was a provisional promise only to be completed once 'Yahweh granted her petition' (Cartledge 1992:12). The vows of widows and divorced women were binding and no less serious than that of a male. Women could make a Nazirite vow – 'a special vow ... of separation to the Lord ...' (Nm 6:1-2; cf Jdg 13) – in which they set themselves apart from the rest of the community to serve YHWH for a period of 30 days (Cartledge 1992:12; McDowell [ed] 2010:142-143).

During this time, they abstained from wine or any food or drink made of grapes, did not cut their hair and did not touch a dead body (cf Nm 6; cf Jdg 13:3-5, 13-14; 1 Sm 1:11; Barton & Blau 1906; cf Marsman 2003:597). Barton and Blau assert that these rules are also identical to those applicable to the high priest and priests during religious service in the Tabernacle. Therefore, Nazirites were regarded in this sense as priests or priestesses (Am 2:11-12; Barton & Blau 1906; cf Olyan 2000:60-61). Women could achieve status and authority, albeit temporary, in this way. One wonders how they would utilise their elevated cultic influences in the community.

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<sup>167</sup> In Exodus 23:20-28, YHWH declared to go with His people into Canaan. He would send His Angel ahead of the people (Ex 23:20). YHWH promised the people an abundant life (Ex 23:25; see Pett 2013i). He would bless their food and water and grant the people health (Ex 23:25). According to Exodus 23:26, the women were promised successful pregnancies and fertility. Women thus had the role of ensuring that the numbers of the people increased (Gill 2012g). In this way, women played a vital part in the preservation and continuation of the covenant. Consequently, a woman's role as mother became a primary component from which her status in the community was derived. I would say that as mothers, women could create order out of disorder in their community. Mothers would teach their children obedience to YHWH, the covenantal principles and rules through inter alia cultic rituals that were essential to produce a flourishing and stable community. It is my opinion that in doing so, a woman's reputation as being holy and blessed by YHWH would be secured. However, for YHWH to keep His promises and fulfill His role of protector, provider and benefactor, the men and women had to fulfill their roles of being obedient and listening to the Angel of the Lord (cf Jdg 2:1-2). In addition, the men and women were to worship YHWH alone and not the Canaanite gods, and they were to demolish their idols and sacred places (Ex 23:21-25 and 34:12-13). As it turned out, the people chose to worship the idols of Canaan (Jdg 2, 3:1-7; 8:33-34) and worship YHWH alongside these gods (Jdg 8:27; 17:1-6; cf 4.4). As a result, even some women who were dedicated followers of YHWH alone (Jdg 13; 14:3) suffered barrenness and all its negative implications.

#### 4.3.3.1 *Hannah and the wife of Manoah*

##### a. Hannah

Hannah was barren. She knew, however, that her barrenness could be removed by the mercy of YHWH through prayer (cf Gn 25:21; Douglas & Tenney 2011b). Accordingly, Hannah prayed to YHWH for a son (1 Sm 1:12).

The proto-Israelite women understood the concept of YHWH as a covenant God (see Lewis 1996:404) and their authority and responsibility within that concept. An analogy is found in Hannah's vow – a sacred personal vow. Sanctified by Eli (1 Sm 1:16), Hannah's vow possibly could not be overturned by her husband, Elkanah (1 Sm 1:21-23; Nm 30:4-7). The vow comprised of two earnest declarations. Hannah firstly dedicated the son she prayed for to lifelong service of YHWH in the Tabernacle at Shiloh (1 Sam 1:11). In the second declaration, she pledged that he would be a Nazirite (1 Sm 1:11; Ellicott 2016e; cf Gill 2012d; Benson 1857d). Hannah's wish for a son was, apart from removing her disgrace from being barren (see above 4.3.3), probably also centred on God's prophecy that he would provide the Israelites with a deliverer – the promised Messiah in Genesis 3:15 (Deffinbaugh 2004). Deffinbaugh (2004) suggests that this was probably the hope of every pregnant woman in the Old Testament. This may explain why sons were highly desired and valued in the Israelite community.

##### b. The wife of Manoah

In Judges 13: 3 the Angel of the Lord appears to the mother of Samson and declares: 'You are sterile and childless, but you are going to conceive and have a son'. This announcement came with the requirement that the mother strictly adhere to the regulations of the Nazirite vow (Jdg 13:3-4).

There are similarities between Hannah and the mother of Samson. Both were barren and thus would have suffered certain shame in their community. Hannah was endlessly taunted by her rival Peninnah (cf 1 Sm 1:6-7). The mother of Samson might have experienced the same and she appeared to be friendless as well. She was alone sitting in the field (cf Jdg 13:9). However, both women would give birth to a son. Although not the promised Messiah, the sons, in their own remarkable ways, would impact on the history of the Israelites (cf Jdg 13:5; cf 1 Sm 3; Deffinbaugh 2004). Upon Samuel and Samson,



chosen men of God, He placed the compulsory lifestyle of a Nazirite. The requirements for a Nazirite included the abstinence from intoxicating beverages as an act of austerity, the growth of hair which symbolised absolute dedication of a man or women's powers to God, and the avoidance of defilement by a corpse (Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges 2016. 1 Samuel 1:11. From: [http://biblehub.com/commentaries/1\\_samuel/1-11.htm](http://biblehub.com/commentaries/1_samuel/1-11.htm); Cartledge 1992:18-26; Phillips 2006:71-77; Ridges 2006:172-173; cf 4.3.2.6; 4.4.3.2).

While the narrative does not mention the mother of Samson praying to God for a son, she would probably have, according to the custom followed by barren women, offered prayers and made vows to God for a child. In Judges 13:5, the Angel of the Lord announces to the women that her son will be a perpetual Nazirite from birth. Therefore, the woman is to live as a Nazirite during her pregnancy (Jdg 13:4). She is also to adhere to the Nazirite requirements while she is breastfeeding her son for he would take his nourishment from her (Coke 1803; Pett 2013f; Coffman 1999f). Coffman (1999f) comments that this announcement is the same as that made to inter alia Hannah. A consistent motif in the Bible is that of a barren woman bringing forth a remarkable son (Coffman 1999f; Constable 2012d).

Probably, the mother of Samson might have presented some thanks offering, possibly in the form of an animal or vegetable (Hirsch et al 1906), at the birth of her son and possibly at the end of her vow; that is probably after she had weaned her child.

#### **4.3.4 Theophanies**

##### *4.3.4.1 Deborah*

In the Old Testament, theophanies were ephemeral visible appearances of God. In the Book of Judges, these rare demonstrations of the presence and glory of God (Manser [ed] 2009a) occurred to three Israelites, two of whom were women. In Judges 5:4-5, Deborah, a model judge in God's eyes who, in addition, was a prophet and law practitioner, described in her praise-song after her victory against the Canaanites a theophany in the form of an earthquake (Manser (ed.) 2009a).<sup>168</sup> Apparently, the theophany was a (divine) response to

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<sup>168</sup> Theophanies in the Old Testament have their counterparts in ancient Near Eastern texts (Hamori 2008:129). For example, God's presence in storm phenomena such as thunder and lightning is likened to Baal the storm-god's appearance in thunder and lightning in the Ugaritic texts (Mann 2011:61). In another instance, the dream theophany of King Solomon and subsequent events in 1 Kings 3:5-15 are analogous to

the breakdown of the covenant in the Israelite community as indicated in Judges when village life came to an end (Jdg 5:7). This dynamic was responsible for the military campaign directed against the Israelites by Sisera (Jdg 1-3).

Deborah heralded God as the Director of all the action (described in chapters 4-5 of Judges). She praised Him for bringing about order and the re-establishment of Israelite life as He intended it to be (McCann 2011:60). McCann (2011:59-60) describes Deborah's theophany as a declaration of the universal authority of God. It was the all-encompassing power of God that was the key to Deborah's authority and that provided gravitas to her leadership (Manser [ed] 2009a; McCann 2011:59-60; cf Hackett 1998:134-135; Guzik 2003c; Lyimo-Mbowe 2015:269). It was the omnipotent God amid the theophany that called Deborah to lead the Israelites against the Canaanites at Hazor (Jdg 5:7; Manser [ed] 2009; cf Guzik 2003c). The authority and headship of Deborah as judge, prophet and in practicing law under YHWH's direction is therefore undisputable (Jdg 4:5-6; Akers 2014:22; cf Hackett 1998:134-135; McCann 2011:59-60; Lyimo-Mbowe 2015:269).

The theophany in Judges 5:4-5 serves as a symbol of the authority given to Deborah that extended her authority as 'mother' in the Israelite society (Jdg 5:7; Webb 2012:614). In Judges 5:4-5, the power of YHWH over all of nature and who fights on behalf of the children of Israel is revealed. YHWH is the Divine Warrior who comes from Seir or Edom and goes to war against the Canaanites. Not only is YHWH's power demonstrated in the shaking of the earth, the flood of rain from the heavens and the quaking of the mountains (Jdg 5:5:4-5), but also is YHWH's might and power displayed in the rising of Deborah, a 'mother in Israel' (Jdg 5:7; Webb 2012:614; cf Pafford 2015).

The divine authority imparted to Deborah appears to supersede biological motherhood (Schneider 2000:89; cf Lyimo-Mbowe 2015:269). 'Deborah is recognized as a mother in Israel due to her performance in leadership' (Lyimo-Mbowe 2015:269) and it 'may be understood as a sort of office' (McCann 2011:56; cf Guzik 2003c). The breakdown of the covenant with YHWH leads to the subsequent collapse of benevolent patriarchy (cf

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the dream of King Kerit at Ugarit (cf Greenfield 1994:87-92; Seow 1984:147). However, there are unique qualities in the messages of theophanies in the Bible: they bring judgment (Ps 18:13-15); they show God's glory in singular manner (Jdg 13:20-22; Lv 9:23-24; Manser [ed] 2009a); and they offer hope and redemption of the Israelite nation through the birth of a son (Gn 18:10; Jdg 13:2). Theophanies in the Bible also include prophetic messages that unfold over centuries in the history of the Israelites (Gn 12:6-7; 15:1-5; 28:13-15).

Jdg 11:34-39; 19-21) and perhaps even the heterarchical order in the *bêt ĕm* and *bêt āb*. The pre-monarchic Israelite community failed to serve the Lord their God and they did not walk in His ways and keep His commandments (Hackett 1998:134-135; Cundall & Morris 2011:149-152; McCann 2011:56). The result was the terrible abuse, death and ordeal of the women in Judges 19 and 21. Yet, the breakdown of the covenant also brings to the foreground and emphasises the roles and status of Deborah (Jdg 4-5); Jael (Jdg 4); the mother of Samson (Jdg 14:1-5); the mother of Micah (Jdg 17:1-4); as well as possibly Achsah (Jdg 1:11-15; cf Hackett 1998:134-135, 144; McCann 2011:56).

#### 4.3.4.2 *The mother of Samson*

According to the dominant cultural ideology, not only was a woman esteemed when she gave birth to children (particularly sons), but she could also be honoured by receiving a personal theophany (Niditch 2008:142-143; Oppenheimer 2009). Through a theophany, YHWH made a promise to Samson's mother – that her son would begin the deliverance of the Israelites from the Philistines (Jdg 13:5). Apparently, YHWH could only fulfill this promise once she obeyed His divine command to abstain from drinking wine and eating unclean food (Jdg 13:4; Niditch 2008:143). The Angel of the Lord appeared to Samson's mother twice (Jdg 13:3-5, 9). At His second visitation, the father built a stone altar (Jdg 13:19). The fire that blazed up from the altar symbolised the purity and holiness of God (Jdg 13:20-22).

These attributes God wished the woman to have: abstinence from wine and beverages or food made of grapes, uncut hair and not touching a dead body (see 4.3.2.6; 4.3.3) for her to give birth to a son, chosen by YHWH to judge or deliver his oppressed people (Niditch 2008:143; Manser [ed] 2009a). The Nazirite lifestyle (comparable to that of a priest [Barton & Blau 1906; Olyan 2000:60-61; Fox 2004:295-296; Hunt 2006]) was desired of the woman. The Nazirite requirements she appears to have successfully accomplished, because she was finally able to give birth to her son, Samson, and fulfill her role in the covenant. The Angel of the Lord's visitations to her and the fire symbols of purification and holiness from the altar seem to indicate that the woman had been elevated to a special place (priesthood state, albeit temporarily) in her society and religion.

Judges 13:4, 7 indicate that Sampson's mother was to fulfill certain (temporary) conditions pertaining to the Nazirite vow (see 4.3.2.6; 4.3.3). Perhaps it was a prelude to the lifelong Nazirite her son was commanded to be. Once again, a woman was set apart by divine commission. In this way, women in the Old Testament gained authority imparted to them by God Himself and under His theocratic rule. They would be divine mechanisms through which YHWH rescued His people (Hackett 1998:134-135, 144; McCann 2011:56; Lyimo-Mbowe 2015:269).

YHWH favoured and blessed women by means of inter alia theophanies by which He promised that the continuation of their kin would be preserved through them (Jdg 13:5; cf Gn 18:10; Webb 2012:614; cf Guzik 2003c). Therefore, women probably went to great extremes to experience YHWH's promised blessings upon their lives and that of their families (Gn 16:1-2; 17:16; Hagar returning to her abusive mistress in Genesis 16:6-9; Rebecca's willingness to marry Isaac in Genesis 24:34-61; Miriam [who is called 'the leading lady of the Exodus' and a hero by MacArthur 2012] and her support of Moses in Exodus [Ex 2:3-4; 15; cf Mi 6:4]; Rahab helping the Israelites in Joshua 2:8-21; Jael's support of Deborah and Barak in Judges 4:17-23; and the daughter of Jephthah's approval of her father honouring his vow in Judges 11:36).<sup>169</sup>

Theophanies in the Book of Judges occurred to Deborah (the extraordinary woman) and the mother of Samson (the ordinary woman) as well as Gideon (Jdg 6:11-26); an indication of equality and authority among women and men in the pre-monarchic period as YHWH had intended under His theocratic rule, benevolent patriarchy and in the heterarchical order of the *bêt ĕm* and *bêt āb* (see 2.2.2.1)

#### 4.3.5 Blessings and curses

As much as covenants and oaths were binding, so too were blessing and curses in which the name of God was invoked as the controlling authority (Yardini 1991:183; Brichto

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<sup>169</sup> The Bible does not ever condone child sacrifice (Dt 12:31, 18:9-12; 2 Ki. 16:3; Ps 106:38; Jr 19:4-5). The sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter presents a parallel to the sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham, but with quite a few opposites (cf Gn 22:1-14 and Jdg 11:30-40). In both instances, a substitute was available for the sacrificed child. God saved Isaac and in his place a ram was provided. Considering Leviticus 27, the priest could have saved Jephthah's daughter. The reader is left to wonder why this option was not taken. Reiss (2009:59, 61-62) comments that both Isaac and Jephthah's daughter 'are seen by Christian commentators as having atoning value and as foreshadowing the crucifixion of Jesus'.

2007:750). Both blessings and curses were grounded in the daily lives of women and men, in which they functioned as types of prayer and worship (Yardini 1991:183; Brichto 2007:750; Skulkina 2013:4).<sup>170</sup> ‘Blessing and cursing’ were used by ‘the individual (excluding the priest), tribe, or the nation’ with the conviction that ‘its relation to the Deity or the supernatural world’ would either be of value or cause harm to those who were blessed or cursed ([insertion mine], Jastrow & Nowack 1906). Well-known was the ‘Priestly Blessing’ in Numbers 6:24-26, found to be in use in religious ceremonies as early as in the late 9<sup>th</sup> century BC (Yardini 1991:181).

At Ketef Hinnom, southwest of Jerusalem, two small silver scrolls incised with fragments of the Priestly Blessing were found (cf Figure 4.4) which would have affected women’s lives in a positive manner when spoken over them. Dated to the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC, the scrolls were rolled up in two amulets that served as apotropaic charms<sup>171</sup> (Yardini 1991:184, Ceasar 2010). It has been suggested that speaking (cf Jdg 17:1-2) or writing certain words, the name of God for example, in a vow or a benediction, such as the priestly blessing found on the two silver scrolls at Ketef Hinnom, held definite (physical) power (Lv 21-23).<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> ‘Blessings and curses’ are defined as:

1. the invocation of good or evil; 2. good fortune or misfortune; and 3. the person or thing upon whom or which the fortune or misfortune falls. ‘Benedictions’ or ‘*barukh*’ include health, long life, many and enduring progeny, wealth, honour, and victory. At the opposite end, ‘maledictions’ or ‘*arur*’ bring sickness and death, barrenness in people and cattle, crop failure, poverty, defeat, and disgrace (Brichto 2007:750, Pedersen 1991:437-441).

<sup>171</sup> Guillaume (1943:251) mentions the discovery of apotropaic figures which were expected ‘to ward off the attacks of demons and their mouthpieces the sorcerers’. These would have been used together with the proper incantations in Babylonian cultic rituals (Guillaume 1943:251; cf Fabry 1998:362-364). Since the syncretic religious ceremonies of the proto-Israelites were infused with those of their neighbours, it can be imagined that they too would have used apotropaic devices to ward off evil in their rituals. The priestly blessing found on the silver scrolls of Ketef Hinnom, however, would have also been used in the official and unadulterated religion dedicated to YHWH alone.

<sup>172</sup> Hempel believes blessings and curses to have originated from Hebrew magic customs, as can be seen in Genesis 48 for instance (Skulkina 2013:11 who cites Hempel 1925:26). Hempel and Pedersen hold that curses (and blessings) were autonomous forces that Hempel feels were released by the power of the spoken word (Pedersen 1991:437; Skulkina 2013:11 who cites Hempel 1925:26). Pedersen describes the power of a curse in terms of the Biblical word for imprecation, ‘*alah*’. While Brichto identifies the word ‘*alah*’, as ‘a conditional curse upon someone in the second or third person’, Pedersen’s view of ‘*alah*’ was that of a ‘poisonous substance with destructive power’ (Pedersen 1991:437; Brichto 2007:751). As such, the power of a word once pronounced in a blessing or a curse is no more under the control of the speaker (Gn 27: 35) and must perform accomplish its mission (Jastrow & Nowack 1906). Consequently, the beneficial or destructive entities of blessings and curses were employed in prayers ‘when human resources are exhausted or, by nature of the situation, unavailing’ (Brichto 2007:751).

The mother of Micah, in Judges 17, upon learning that the thief who had stolen her silver and whom she had cursed earlier was her son, swiftly responded with a blessing since it was held that a blessing invalidated a curse (Jastrow & Nowack 1906; Yardini 1991:183-184). The mother of Micah, according to the beliefs of her time, may have assumed that she had an enemy who performed dark magic against her (Ps 59:2, 5; 141:4), ergo the disappearance of her money.

The curses of this ‘evil power’ needed to be counteracted with her own curses of even ‘greater power.’ Thus, she would have prayed to God whose ‘cursing power’ was greater in addition to uttering the ‘appropriate curse formulae’ to legitimise the curse (Smith, D 1997:188). His fear of the tangible power of a curse might explain why Micah, upon hearing his mother uttering the curse, returned the stolen silver.<sup>173</sup> Micah’s terror would have been amplified if his mother were the head of the household. Evidently, the mother was a wealthy woman with the authority and status that goes with substantial wealth. Consequently, as the matriarch of the household, Micah’s mother believed she could affect God’s blessing or wrath on him.

The blessings and curses uttered by holy and morally loftier women and men such as priests and prophets (Deborah blessing Jael and cursing the non-participating tribes and the enemy in Judges 5, for example) and heads of households held to be in close fellowship with God were seen as superior and especially effective (Jastrow & Nowack 1906; Smith, D 1997:189). It is possible that Micah’s mother may have used amulets and incantations like the silver scrolls from Ketef Hinnom (cf Figure 4.4; Yardeni 1991:184; cf Nm 5:23)<sup>174</sup> in her cultic rituals. It is probable that, had his mother not willingly blessed him after cursing him, Micah would have requested it.

The mother uttered her blessing in a reversal prayer – another cultic ritual that required the assistance of the Deity in ‘symbolic actions’ (Smith, D 1997:188-189). Blessings and curses could also exist within the context of cultic rites to ascertain truth. In Numbers 5:11-31, there is a rather strange account of what appears to be a magical

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<sup>173</sup> Faraone et al (2005:161-186) discuss the mother of Micah’s curse and blessing and how her curse could be a ‘precedent for Greek and Latin curses against thieves’.

<sup>174</sup> There is no reason to think that apotropaic objects from Ketef Hinnom were not cultic traditions copied from earlier times. Yardeni mentions that amulets and inscriptions like the ones from Ketef Hinnom, dating between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> century AD, were found in numerous places in Palestine, Syria and Asia Minor (Yardeni 1991:184) and were obviously ritual objects inherited from previous generations.

ceremony performed to ascertain a wife's fidelity (Frymer-Kensky 1984:11-26).<sup>175</sup> The narrative emphasises the ancient principle that words spoken (and written) in blessings and curses were in themselves conduits of magical powers, extant in their own right (Frymer-Kensky 1984:24-25; Vanhoozer 2005:851-854) and stronger in their efficacy when joined with idols and invoked on those magical high places of the ancient Canaanites.

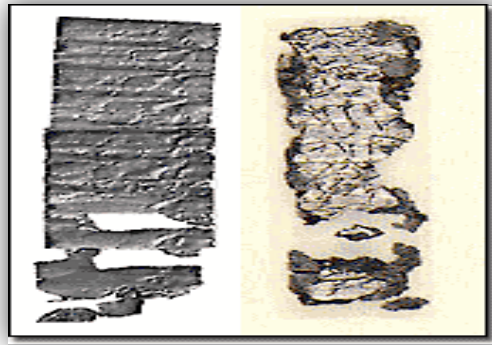


Figure 4.4 Priestly Blessing. Silver amulet, 7<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> century BC Ketef Hinnom (Schoville 2003)

#### 4.3.5.1 Deborah's blessing and cursing

In Judges 5:24, Deborah blesses Jael for her slaying of Sisera. In Deborah's victory song, it is a non-Israelite woman, one suspect of probable treachery since Heber, her husband's family, is allied itself with Jabin the king of Hazor (Jdg 4:16); who is declared to be praiseworthy and 'most blessed of all women' (Streete 1997:60). By contrast, the prophetess and ruler of Israel curses the inhabitants of Meroz (Jdg 5:23)<sup>176</sup> who did not join the battle against the enemies of God (Jdg 5:31).

<sup>175</sup> The test of a wife suspected of committing adultery, also known as the ordeal of bitter water or the ordeal of jealousy, is described as less of a magic rite to bring about physical harm than a procedure, symbolic and otherwise, to induce psychological effects. Driver (1956:74-77) offers meanings of key words pertinent in the text of Numbers 5:11-31 and among others translates *mê hammārîm* as 'water(s) of contention, dispute', by which 'the truth is elicited and made manifest'. The water is not a magical potion or sacred water but 'pure or clean water'. If the woman is guilty the curse of the water will induce miscarriage or if she has not conceived in an illicit affair will cause barrenness (Driver 1956:74-77). The psychological effects of being shamed in public by being dressed in black before being 'led or dragged before the priest' who uncovers her hair would be devastating to any woman. Coupled with her fear of the 'greatest misfortune of which a Hebrew woman is capable, sterility or miscarriage', her belief in the curse of the water, naturally, could be damaging on her body, possibly leading to miscarriage and infertility (Driver 1956:74-77; see Van der Toorn 1988:436-440 for analogies of water in drinking trials in ancient Near Eastern texts). In my opinion, it is the words of the curse written on the scroll washed into the water rather than the water alone that causes the curse (cf Nm 11:32-24).

<sup>176</sup> It is unknown who the citizens of Meroz were and where the place was located (Webb 2012). Cundall & Morris (2011) speculate that they were an Israelite tribe. However, according to Douglas and Tenney (2011),

The irony of the narrative is that a non-Israelite woman demonstrated the willingness, loyalty and courage to play a role in the covenant relationship with YHWH, while the absent tribes acted treacherously and forsook their part in the covenant. The paradox is that contrary to what is believed about the dominant cultural ideology (that is oppressive patriarchy), it was the non-ideal body (women) that triumphed over the ideal body (the male warrior) and saved the day. It was not one woman (which may have been a fluke) but two (which says this was not a coincidence) whose actions lead the Israelite tribes into victory. It might have been that within a variant patriarchy existed a more benevolent type of social organisation, the outflow of theocracy, where women were allowed autonomous behaviour and independent decision-making. If so, then women in their roles as mothers and wives occupied an associated status in the community that was recognised and far more authoritative and valued than what current scholarship may believe.

Furthermore, a tent-dwelling woman was heralded a heroine and blessed for her role in the destruction of the Canaanite army while the mighty warriors of the non-participating tribes were censured for breaking the covenant and tribal unity (see Webb 2012). Jael was celebrated for her allegiance to YHWH while the enemy of YHWH was cursed and rendered powerless for their opposition of (the covenant between) YHWH and the tribes (see Cundall & Morris 2011).

While ‘the curse against Meroz is likened to a formal curse statement in a treaty document’, it is probably a ‘poetic adaption of these normal prophetic and legal forms of speech...’ (Webb 2012). Furthermore, a precise judgement was not declared against the inhabitants of Meroz. Therefore, Webb (2012) believes it to be more of a ‘strong disapproval than a curse’. It is an entreaty to YHWH who would decide on the appropriate punishment (Webb 2012). However, Douglas & Tenney (2011h) comment that the curse implied the extermination of Meroz.

Be that as it may, it could be that Deborah represented YHWH in her roles as prophetess, judge as well as in her role as ‘a mother in Israel’. Therefore, the resultant

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since the annihilation of Meroz is implied in the curse, it could not have been an Israelite tribe, but rather the inhabitants were probably Canaanites allied to the Israelites.



magnitude of her status and authority made both blessing and curse powerful enough to be binding and enforced by YHWH (Jdg 4:4-5).

#### **4.3.6 Sacrifices and festivals in honour of YHWH**

As mentioned (see 4.3.1) in Exodus 23:25-26, YHWH expressed His covenant in which the people's faithfulness to Him would secure their blessings and the lives of their children. YHWH would bless the women with fertility and healthy babies if they obeyed Him and did not worship other gods (see 4.3.1; Ex 23:26). Under YHWH's theocratic rule, the people would flourish, and their children would live.

Therefore, it is inexplicable why some women would jeopardise their reproductive life by adopting the supposed hallowed altars and sacred poles of the Canaanites (among other foreign rituals) into their religious practices.<sup>177</sup> A possible reason might be carnality associated with the worship of the Canaanite gods in which the people could connect with the deities through sexual rites. The people might not have perceived of these rites as sexual promiscuousness in the worldview of the Canaanite cults, but as a cultic ideology that formed the essence of an internal relationship between the god and the devotee (Halbertal & Margalit 1992:266). The anthropomorphic nature of the Canaanite cult in which the gods became corporeal and perceived as possessing bodies and 'emotions and a physic life' probably attracted the people as well (Halbertal & Margalit 1992:109-110; see also Saggs 1965). However, some women were loyal and devoted to YHWH (cf Jdg 4-5; 13; 14:3) and would have participated in making sacrifices to YHWH and in the festivals dedicated to Him.

A most significant cultic ritual, and one in which women participated, was oblation. Sacred sacrifice formed one of the central axis of (women's) religious behaviour in the pre-monarchic era (cf Jdg 13:18, 23). As an act of sacrificial worship, the burnt offering, traditionally offered by the male head of the family or clan, was the most important, while all the other offerings were made exclusively within that context (Jastrow et al 1906; cf

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<sup>177</sup> Perhaps the pervasive nature of the superstitions that permeated their daily lives required the worship of multiple deities. Perhaps it was the idea that unlike YHWH, the gods needed men and women as much as the people needed the gods by way of a perpetuating symbiotic association. In this way, the deities could exert an impact upon the (nurturing) nature of women (Saggs 1965).

Tigay 1999:175-178; Schwartz 1999:206-210; Motyer 2001:676; Wiersbe 2007:295).<sup>178</sup> Leviticus 1:17 indicates that male Israelites (probably the *paterfamilias* as head of their households) presented the burnt offering that may have been 'from either the herd or the flock' or in instances of poverty 'a dove or a young pigeon' to the priests (Jastrow et al 1906; cf Schwartz 1999:208; Wolf 2007:202; Evans 2009:5).

Cultic sacrifices were made daily, monthly and annually (King & Stager 2001:353). They were performed for the exoneration of sin and as thank or praise offerings as well as purification offerings (Hirsch et al 1906; Porter 1995:122; Walton, Matthews & Chavalas 2000d:130-131; LaHaye & Hindson 2009:209).

At the beginning of the YHWH cult, religious offerings were unsophisticated and secondary rituals. Later, with settlement in the Hill Country, Canaanite sacrificial practices were assimilated into the simple Yahwistic customs of veneration<sup>179</sup> and became common sacred ceremonies at the Israelite high place shrines and sanctuaries (Morgenstern 1918:133; cf Porter 1995:122; Smith 2002:10-12; McKenzie 2010:52).

The sacred assembly, during the era of the Judges, occurred at the Tabernacle (the principal sanctuary) at Shiloh (Jdg 18:31).<sup>180</sup> Ackerman (2016) states that archaeological evidence and Biblical tradition indicate that shrines located in households and regional sanctuaries would have been nearer and more accessible to pre-monarchic Israelite women than the sanctuary at Shiloh (cf Ebeling 2010:124-125). At Shiloh, women too could celebrate the seasonal festivals, attend the sacrifices associated with them and make vows (Jdg 21:12, 19; Sm 1:3, 21; Coleman & Elsner 1995:41; De Vaux 1997:304; see Hirsch et al 1906; cf Losch Campbell 2003:39-40; 2005:217-218). Deuteronomy 12:4-7, declares

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<sup>178</sup> Bird (1999:17), contrary to Peritz (1898:126-127), observes that 'presenting a sacrificial offering to the priest were not in itself a sacrificial action but an act of offering to which all are bound'. The 'offering of sacrifices' was 'the one religious activity from which women appear to have been excluded' (Bird 1999:17). On the other hand, Ackerman (2016) mentions that Hannah seems to have 'joined with her husband Elkanah in the sacrificial offering' (1 Sm 1:25).

<sup>179</sup> Hirsch et al (1906) believe many foreign (Canaanite) features were incorporated into the priestly traditions. They name as examples 'Azazel', 'the scapegoat' and 'the red heifer'. See also Gottwald (2001:171), Munnich (2008:39-56) and Dolansky (2007:20).

<sup>180</sup> The Ark of the Covenant represented the Glory of YHWH. It appears that the sacred assembly worshipped wherever The Ark of the Covenant was (see Warner 1976:65). While the Israelite tribes were conquering Canaan, the transportable Tabernacle, which housed the Ark of the Covenant, resided in Gilgal (Jos 4:19-29). The Tabernacle was later moved to Shiloh where it remained for 350 years (see Blackstone 2014:151). According to Judges (Jdg 20:26-28), the people also worshipped at Bethel, where the Ark of the Covenant was, and seemingly at Bochim (Jdg 2:1-5). See also Warner (1976:64-66; 70-74).

that it was only at the Tabernacle at Shiloh that the people could assemble for the yearly pilgrimage festivals. At Shiloh could the cultic assembly worship and perform acts of burnt offerings of sacred sacrifices. There could peace offerings and other (freewill) offerings, tithes and special gifts be presented and pledges be made (Jdg. 21:12, 19; 1 Sm.1:3, 21; 2:19; Hirsch et al 1906; De Vaux 1997:304; King & Stager 2001:357-359; see Ebeling 2010:124-125).

Worship of YHWH included the tri-annual feasts of 'the festival of Unleavened Bread', later combined with Passover; the 'festival of Harvest', later called the 'festival of Weeks'; and the 'festival of Ingathering', later also known as the 'festival of Booths' (King & Stager 2001:354; cf Wellhausen 2013:19; Gorospe & Ringma 2016:300). It was obligatory for men to attend these feasts (Dt 16:16; Ex 23:17; Lv 23). Women's presence, on the other hand, was voluntary (1 Sm 1:9, 21-22; see Goldberg 2001:164; Ebeling 2010:124; Ackerman 2011:90-91) since their duties as wives and mothers bound them to their households. However, YHWH would bless them at Shiloh if they were obedient in following all His religious instructions.

Men and women also assembled (at a sanctuary of YHWH) at Shechem (Jos 24:1, 6), at Mizpeh in Gilead (Jdg 21:11), at Mizpeh in Benjamin (Jdg 20:1), at Gilgal (1 Sm 11:15), at Hebron (2 Sm 5:3), at Bethel (where they sacrificed) and at Bochim (according to Judges 3:5; 21:4), as well as at Beersheba (Am 4:4; 5; 8:14) (Hirsch et al 1906; Miller 2000:77; Noll 2001:1165; Stolz 2005:843; see also Van der Toorn 1996:146-147, 252). Haran (1995:54-56) remarks that there is no archaeological evidence for an actual temple building at Beersheba and that the (assembly) area at Mizpah in Gilead was an open-air cultic place. Gottwald (1999:563-567) understands the 'sanctuary of Yahweh' to be 'strictly Yahwist' located 'outside [the city of Shechem] sanctuary'. He adds, 'this cult complex' is described 'as consisting of a tree, a stone and a sacred building' that co-existed at the same time as the inside temple of Baal-berith. He believes the temples in Joshua 24 and Judges 9:4 to be the same. He also believes that the temple was initially Canaanite that was later turned into a Yahwist temple and then reverted to the original Baal temple. Campbell (1983:264-267) cites the unearthing of pottery during excavations at Tell er-Ras, located on Mt. Gerizim near Shechem, dated to the Late Bronze Age and Iron Age as well as pottery discovered on the east sides of the mountain and dated to the 13<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> century

BC as evidence of Israelite occupation in the Shechem area and the subsequent existence and use of the sanctuary or sanctuaries by the Israelites.

For this reason, women would choose to attend the feasts if they could (Breyfogle 1910:14). Sacred meals were an important part of historical events and treaties made in the lives of the people (Gn 26:30; 27:33; 31:54; Nm 25:2; Jos 8:30-34). Most important was the revealing of YHWH's presence in theophanies (cf 4.3.4; 4.3.4.1 and 4.3.4.2; Ex 24; Jdg 5; 13:4; 1 Ki 19:5,7), and undoubtedly the cultic festivals in Judges 9:27 and 21:19, for example (McCree 1926:120-128), were also meaningful expressions of the people's religious life.

At the annual feasts in Shiloh, the women with their families participated in the consecrated sacrificial meals. One can only imagine the thoughts and conversations of the women as they looked upon the Tent of Meeting. Did they have to urge unwilling husbands and children to go on the pilgrimage to Shiloh? Did they remember and remind their households of the full and magical history of YHWH's dwelling place at Shiloh (Morgenstern 1918:132-139) and the contribution of their predecessors' generous gifts and skills in its construction?

Morgenstern relates that the Tent of Meeting itself was the central pivot of the Israelite religion in the desert (and not the sacrificial rituals that later became an integral part of the hybrid religion in Canaan) because it was there where God's presence was manifested. God's presence in the Tent of Meeting made the 'use of cult objects and rituals illogical...' (Morgenstern 1918:136-137). However, YHWH's holy presence was not enough for the Israelites who had their eye on the use of cult objects and elaborate (sensual) rituals which formed integral components of the religions of their neighbours.

### **4.3.7 The roles of women in the religion of YHWH**

#### *4.3.7.1 Deborah the warrior*

The religion of Iron Age I Israel, being social in nature, extended itself not only in the households of the Israelites. Warfare also displayed a 'religious character' (Von Rad 1991:4). Acting upon a Divine word of knowledge, Deborah (see 4.3.7.2) sent for Barak, son of Abinoam, and said: 'The Lord, the God of Israel commands: Go take with you ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun and lead them up to Mount Tabor. I will lure Sisera,

the commander of Jabin's army,<sup>181</sup> with his chariots and his troops to the Kishon River and give him into your hands' (Jdg 4:6-7). The military commander Barak refused to wage war against Sisera without the prophetess by his side (Jdg 4:8). From the spies sent out, Barak would have gathered military intelligence of Sisera's army, his fortress town and possibly Hazor as well (Jdg 1:23; 18:2). Unfavourable reports may have prompted him to require the prophetess' presence. He was fully aware of her influential standing with YHWH and the people. He had no qualms, unlike the misgivings of a warrior such as probably Abimelech (killed by a woman in Judges 9:53), with being associated with a woman in battle – despite the dominant cultural ideology of the day.

Deborah submitted the prophetic command to Barak to assemble an army of 10 000 men and go to Mount Tabor (Jdg 4:6). God would lure the Canaanite army to the Kishon river where Barak could overpower and conquer them (Jdg 4:7). As mentioned previously, Barak remonstrated and was willing to follow orders only if Deborah accompanied him. Deborah agreed and because of Barak's condition uttered her second prophecy that a woman would kill Sisera and so gain the honour that should have been Barak's (cf Jdg 4:6-9). Reardon (2000) describes Deborah's prophetic utterances as sweet like honey.<sup>182</sup> Barak, however, must have thought differently for despite Deborah's favourable prophecy he insisted on her presence at the battlefield.

Brenner-Idan (2014:63) identifies Deborah as 'the initiator, the brains, the inspiration' behind the military campaign against Sisera, while Barak takes the role of 'second in command, the executive arm'. Boling (1996:103) describes Deborah as the one with the military strategy. Yee (1993:111) comments that it was possible for the women in pre-monarchic Israel to attain leadership positions in war because military organisation was

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<sup>181</sup> Sisera was commander of the army of Jabin, a King of Canaan who ruled in Hazor. Sisera lived in Harosheth Haggoyim and had at his disposal nine hundred iron chariots that assisted in his oppression of the Israelites ongoing for 20 years at the time Deborah was a prophet (Judges 4:2-3). The site of El Ahwat, situated between Katzir-Harish and Nahal Iron (Wadi Ara), has been suggested as Sisera's fortified base of Harosheth Haggoyim. The site excavated under archaeologist Zertal between 1993-2000 was dated to the Late Bronze Age and Iron Age I – 13<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> centuries BC. Siegel-Itzkovich (2010) mentions that Zertal found that the architecture of the battlements, walls, passageways in the walls and circular huts were different from other Canaanite towns, which led him to believe that the site may have been a Shardana town. The Shardana were a Sea-People who infiltrated the Levant in the latter part of the Bronze Age (Siegel-Itzkovich 2010; cf Zertal 2012:4-8).

<sup>182</sup> This he infers from her name, which means 'bee', and that the name Deborah sounds like the Hebrew word *dabar* for 'word' or 'speech' (Reardon 2000; cf Ez 3:3; Ps 118:103).

domestic in nature. The Israelites did not have a permanent professional army. Instead, fighting men were drawn from the households of the *mišpāhā*. For this reason, war was essentially a domestic concern. Consequently, women would have been familiar with military procedures and practices and they might have been trained in the arts of war (Yee 1993:111). Women's military knowledge and training may explain why, in addition to her faith in God's message of deliverance, Deborah confidently agreed to go with Barak.

The Israelites sought escape from Canaanite oppression (Jdg 4:2-3). The fighting men of Israel were neutralised 'so that not a shield nor a spear was to be seen among them' (Douglas & Tenney 2011c; cf Mattingly 1996:1060; cf Jdg 5:7-8). Deborah was prepared to bring about the deliverance of the Israelites. Undaunted by the Canaanite might and their nine hundred iron chariots, Deborah summoned Barak from Kedesh in Naphtali and described her stratagem (Boling 1996:103). Insisting on Deborah's presence, Barak with her assistance assembled fighting men from Zebulun and Naphtali, Ephraim, Benjamin, Manasseh (Machir) and Issachar (Jdg 4:10; 5:14-18).

As leader of the Israelites, Deborah's greatest accomplishment was probably the union of six of the twelve tribes of Israel to fight against the military might of Sisera (Cundall & Morris 2011:76; cf Boling 1992a:113-114; Exum 1996:233). Though she joined the Israelite army upon Barak's insistence, she did not engage in the actual battle. At Harosheth-Haggoyim, located near the fertile plain of Esdraelon, southeast of Mt Carmel, Sisera mustered his army and chariots and was vanquished by Deborah and Barak (Jdg 4:13; Baly 1996:405; Boraas 1996:406). Sisera's army and chariots were lured to meet Barak at the Kishon River (Jdg 4:7) in an area near Tanaach (Jdg 5:19; Lapp 1996:574).

Lapp (1996:574) mentions that the Kishon River is usually a 'sluggish brook' for the most part of the year and 'swampy' in the rainy season. Cundall and Morris (2011:189), however, note that it is improbable that Sisera would have used his chariots in the rainy season. According to Judges 5:4-5, 20-21, it was possibly a thunderstorm that filled the Kishon and caused it to flood (Cundall & Morris 2011:189, 191). Cundall and Morris suggest that Deborah might have seen the oncoming storm and, aware of the advantage it would give the Israelites, she possibly gave the command to attack. It was the torrential force of the Kishon that swept away (the remnants of) Sisera's army (Jdg 5:21) after they were put to the sword by the Israelites (Jdg 4:16; Lapp 1996:574; Douglas & Tenney

2011c). ‘It was a sweeping victory... Sisera deserted his position and attempted to escape on foot’ (Cundall & Morris 2011:191-192).<sup>183</sup>

#### 4.3.7.2 *Deborah the prophetess*

Analogous to the prophets of both genders mentioned in the Mari documents, Israelite women and men also served their high state officials in a prophetic capacity (cf Jdg 4). Few women are mentioned as ‘legitimate prophetesses’ in the Old Testament and among them number Miriam, Deborah, Huldah and the ‘false prophetess Noadiah’ (Emmerson 1989:374-375; cf Grabbe 2013:24-25; Brenner-Idan 2014:58). These few, according to Emmerson (1989:376), are ‘representative of others’.

Prophets delivered important and divinely inspired messages by way of dreams and oracles (Skolnik [ed] 2007:540). Brenner-Idan (2014:59) notes that the gender of the Israelite women who participated in prophetic activities did not ‘discredit their inspiration or message’ (Nissinen 2013:27-59).

In the Book of Judges, the importance of prophecy is emphasised more in the character of a woman namely Deborah, who has the title of prophetess (Jdg 4:4), than it is in any of the male characters in the text, such as Gideon, who is addressed by the Angel of the Lord, as a warrior (Jdg 6:12). What makes the role of the prophetess more prominent is that it is combined with military initiative and leadership. Moses is the only other male character to whom both roles are ascribed before settlement in Canaan (Dt 34:10). The importance of the parallels between Deborah and Moses ‘significantly raises the status of Deborah’ more so than was previously held (Herzberg 2013:15-33; cf Reardon 2000).

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<sup>183</sup> Siegel-Itzkovich (2010) reports on the discovery of a metal fragment, the linchpin of a war chariot used by Sisera in Judges 4, found at El-Ahwat. Mayes (1969:353-360) describes the historical context of the battle against Sisera. Analogous to Deborah’s involvement in a military campaign are the numerous ancient societies where female deities are depicted as warriors. Of the 234 deities present in the Ugaritic pantheon, two goddesses, Anath and Astarte, are described as war deities. Both goddesses appear in the Egyptian religion where a plaque of a single goddess denotes the unification of the three principal female deities of Ugarit (Spar 2009, cf Frymer-Kensky 2007:581-582; Pope 2007:131). In ancient Egypt, the warrior goddess Sekhmet was worshipped as well. The impact of these warrior goddesses on the (human) women rulers and women warriors was significant and comparable to YHWH’s influence on Deborah in Judges 4-5 (Dean 2013:1-14). Among the Near Eastern queens and warriors who led their people into battle featured Ahhotep I and Ahhotep II (1600 BC); Shammuramat (Semiramis), ruler of the Assyrian Empire (at the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century BC); and Arabian queen Samsi, who revolted against Tiglath-Pileser III (ca 720 BC). For a more detailed list of warrior women including those in Europe and other Asian countries, see World Heritage Encyclopedia 2015. Timeline of Ancient Women in Warfare. From: [http://self.gutenberg.org/articles/timeline\\_of\\_women\\_in\\_ancient\\_warfare#cite\\_note-books.google.com-1](http://self.gutenberg.org/articles/timeline_of_women_in_ancient_warfare#cite_note-books.google.com-1).

In my opinion, the only possible limitation of a female seer's prophetic activities occurred when she was excluded from the use of devices such as the ephod (Ex 28:6) and the *urim* and *thummim* (Ex 28:30).<sup>184</sup> Only the priests in their roles as oracles could use these divination 'machines' (Brenner-Idan 2014:59). However, Deborah's authority was so great that she was not restricted or bound to any mechanical device to hear from God and guide the people by means of her oracles (cf Jdg 4:6; Reardon 2000).

According to the Mari documents, the usual custom in bringing a prophetic message was for the prophet to deliver it in person to the intended receiver (the king) or audience (Malamat 1987:35; Skolnik [ed] 2007:540). However, in Judges we find the prophetess Deborah summoning Barak to her to convey the divine message. This reversed situation may be an indication of how great Deborah's authority and influence was.

Deborah, ruler and prophetess of Israel, though she could not obtain priesthood, did share two characteristics with the priests in Shiloh, namely that of teaching God's laws and ordinances and administering God's word and divine revelation to the people. According to Judges, Deborah's judicial duties were performed under a palm tree between Ramah and Bethel in the Hill Country of Ephraim (Jdg 4:5). Perhaps the palm tree of Deborah was outside her residence, perhaps somewhere near the matriarch's homestead. It was her prophetic power, however, that she would have experiences on an ongoing basis outside at the palm tree and inside her household.

Prophets were not only seers or foretellers of the future but also teachers, revealers and interpreters of God's law and His nature to the Israelite society (Finlay 2004). They were admonishers, exhorters and generally there to remind the Israelites of their promise to serve YHWH (Finlay 2004). Deborah as a prophetess would have received divine revelations at any time and most probably when she was alone (Ex 3:12; 1 Sm 3:2-15).

Ancient Near Eastern prophets depended on divine revelation, as did the Israelite seers.<sup>185</sup> Deborah as a prophetess of YHWH relied on 'special insights and knowledge'

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<sup>184</sup> However, the exclusion from using these 'devices' was not much of a limitation. The ephod and *urim and thummim* were employed for 'yes' and 'no' answers in response to questions put to them whereas full prophetic messages came primarily through divinely inspired dreams (cf Hamori 2013:169-192).

<sup>185</sup> Hagan places divination in the ancient Near East into two groups: 1. making inferences from observing animal (e.g. organs), nature (e.g. birds, the weather) and human occurrences (fetuses and manipulation involving lots, for example) and 2. divine communication through a person's internal perceptions (Hagan 1996).



(Lange 2007:461) from God to lead her people and to act as arbiter in settling their disputes (Jdg 4:4-5). Instinctual prediction meant that a prophet relayed divine knowledge to the larger society (Lange 2007:461) that came to her in dreams and visions without assistance from the outside environment. The prophet(ess) as a deliverer of divine communication served as a means for the people to depend on God solely for information and revelations of the future.

The Near Eastern nations divined by manipulation, nature, animals, etcetera. Genesis 25:22 indicates that women sought oracles to enquire about their wellbeing and that of their families. The method of divination used in this instance is unknown. While most types of divination were banned from the YHWH cult, preference was given to prophecies and dreams as well as the priestly *urim* and *thummim* in the ephod as sacred lots<sup>186</sup> (Jdg 17:5, 18:14, 17, 20; Hagan 1996; cf Cryer 1994:230; 233-236; King & Stager 2001:325, 330). Prophets at times went into euphoric trances which were brought about by music and dancing (King & Stager 2001:287). As a woman, Deborah could also deliver prophecies in her household, wherein the hub of religious activity occurred in the Iron Age (see Dever 2015:191).

Judges 4:2 narrates that the Israelites were oppressed by the Canaanite king, Jabin, and the commander of his army, Sisera, for twenty years because of their disloyalty and disobedience to YHWH. The nine hundred iron chariots mentioned in Judges 4:2 emphasises the might of Sisera's army. Deborah's prophetic utterances to Barak (see 4.3.7.1) must have been said with much courage and faith in YHWH. A humble Deborah granted Him the glory for their victory over Sisera in Judges 5 (Higgs 2007).

Judges 4:4 introduces Deborah as a prophetess – a very special role and status for women in the dominant cultural ideology – before any other title. She was the spokesperson of God who received direct communication from Him to guide and lead the people (Mouser 2006:21). Assis (2006:112) observes that Deborah officiated as a prophetess on three occasions: the oracular authorisation of Barak to fight against Sisera (Jdg 4:6-7); her prophetic utterance of Sisera's death by a woman (Jdg 4:9) and the victory of Barak over

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<sup>186</sup> King and Stager speculate that the *Urim* and *Thummim* were sacred lots stored in the ephod. They may have resembled the faience dices (found in the Tel Dan cultic complex [King & Stager 2001:325; cf Biran 1986:179, 181]).

Sisera's army (Jdg 4:15-16; Reardon 2000; Assis 2006:112). Coffman (1999b) notes that Deborah's power as a prophetess emerged in these supernatural forecasts.

It is obvious that her prophecy in Judges 4:9 was an immediate response to Barak's request after he received the divinatory commission to go to war against Sisera in Judges 4:7 from Deborah. Filled with the spirit of YHWH, Deborah's prophetic abilities were powerful and instantaneous (Pett 2013b). As a prophetess, she had sacred wisdom received from divine instruction by God (cf Jdg 4:6-7) through visions and the immediate inspiration of the Spirit of YHWH (Henry 2016).

Similar to a male prophet, a prophetess occupied a central role in society. Her ability to obtain divine revelations through dreams and visions served to enhance her prominence in the Israelite society (Malamat 1987:35-36).<sup>187</sup> As a prophetess of God, Deborah's responsibility was to reprimand and caution the people as well as warn them against doing evil and implore them to worship YHWH (Henry 2016; cf Jdg 4:1). Her messages, on the other hand, would have also been sympathetic and understanding in the oppressive times the people were experiencing (cf Jdg 4:2-3). Therefore, her prominence may have been due to divinely inspired messages to fear YHWH and to place before Him their hope for deliverance from the abuses and injustices suffered under Canaanite rule.<sup>188</sup>

Both Emmerson (1989:376) and Elior (2003) concur that women prophets were not thought of as unusual despite the dominant cultural ideology. They could lead, advise, and educate society – be that on YHWH's behalf or for some other god or goddess. Their prophetic ability allowed them keen insight into the perceptions of good and bad that prevailed in their communities (Elior 2003).

#### 4.3.7.3 *Deborah the lawgiver and judge*

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<sup>187</sup> In addition to the 'professional' prophets, Malamat (1987:43-44) mentions lay prophets at Mari who consisted of ordinary people among whom women featured a large number. For more information on the prophets at Mari as well as comparisons between Mari prophets and Biblical prophets, see Malamat (1987:33-52).

<sup>188</sup> In later times in the Old Testament, the prophets of God such as Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel were not admired for speaking out against the people and the king for their idolatrous ways. In a situation, reminiscent of 2 Timothy 4:3 there was also a band of 'false prophets' who spoke only good news and God's favour upon the Israelite people despite the bad ways into which they had fallen. Carroll (1989:203-204) comments that 'the social status of prophets would ... be determined by the institutions and social values of their communities'. The wrath that the prophets incurred upon themselves for speaking out against these values can only be imagined.

Goldstein (2015:16) states that ‘sometimes women were more powerful than men’. In agreement with Emmerson (1989:371-394), she concedes that women were acknowledged in the narratives of the Old Testament, particularly in the books of Genesis and Exodus. Goldstein (2015:19) remarks that the writer of the books of Genesis and Exodus does not ‘omit’ women from the narratives, but rather ‘goes out of his way to highlight women’. She concludes that ‘there is not a denial of women in P. The priestly source or P is one of the theorized sources of the Pentateuch’ (Goldstein 2015:19; see Boadt 1984:93, 95, 103-107).<sup>189</sup> There appears to exist a benign patriarchal social organisation (see 2.4.1.1 a, b, c; 2.4.1.2; 2.4.1.3) in the books of Genesis and Exodus (Goldstein 2015:19)<sup>190</sup> that might have been transferred into the pre-monarchic period. Like Miriam, Deborah was a prophet (Carter 1997). Deborah, however, apparently occupied a more powerful leadership position than Miriam (Ex 15:20) and Sarah (cf Gn17:15) before her, as well as Esther (Est 1-10) and Jezebel (1 Ki 16:31) in later times.

I believe, therefore, that Deborah’s authority and leadership was the result of a more benevolent patriarchal system, which was the result of theocracy through which the covenantal principles of YHWH inter alia equality, respect and value of both men and women were more visible in the character of Deborah (as well as Achsah [Jdg 1:14-15; Jael [Jdg 4]; the mother of Samson [Jdg 14:2-5] and the mother of Micah [Jdg 17:1-4]). It was theocracy above all else that made it possible for Deborah and many of the women in the pre-monarchic period to occupy leadership roles and have associated status in that era.

In the Book of Judges, Deborah was also declared to be a judge and that meant she was more than just a judicial leader/lawgiver. She was also the military and civil leader of the Israelites (Carter 1997; cf Mouser 2006:19; Assis 2006:110). Deborah, compared to the other judges, occupied three unique roles in the Book of Judges. She was ‘the only savior who is a prophet’, the only judicial arbiter and she was the only female judge (Assis 2006:111). In the analogous Mari documents, the terms *šiptum* and *šapiūtum* are found for

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<sup>189</sup> According to the ‘Documentary Hypothesis’, the Pentateuch – the first five books of the Old Testament – is purported to be a compilation of four sources namely Yahwist, Elohist, Deuteronomist and Priestly Writer (JEDP) written at various epochs in the Israelite history. Greenstein (1996:1055-1059) provides a comprehensive description of the sources of the first five books of the Bible.

<sup>190</sup> Goldstein draws her conclusions from a study of inter alia the genealogical records of Genesis 5 and 11 that are texts ascribed to the P or Priestly source dated to pre-exile 722-586 BC. She comments that ‘hatred of women and violent utterances against them’ are not found ‘in the writings of P, as they do in the later exilic prophet Ezekiel [586-538 BC]’ (Goldstein 2015:15-21).

‘judge’. Their Biblical cognates in the Old Testament are *shafot*, *shofet* and *mishpat* (Malamat 2007:539).<sup>191</sup> Malamat (2007:539) comments that ‘neither in the Mari documents nor in the Bible is the primary connotations of these words judicial’; instead, they denote the ideas of ‘governorship and rule’ (cf Unger 1988g).

Deborah, apparently, was the Iron Age I equivalent of a queen, but with much more power than Jezebel, for example. She was the direct representative of God.<sup>192</sup> Apparently, the authors/editors of the Book of Judges (Jdg 4-5; 1:14-15; 13 and 14:1-5) needed to show wives were in an equal partnership with their husbands (Reardon 2000). The appearance of Deborah as ruler and judge of the Israelites was therefore an unsurprising (to the authors/editors of Judges) event since both men and women were called to be leaders and deliverers of the Israelites in YHWH’s covenantal rule (Glahn 2011). The character of Deborah, a devoted follower of YHWH, serves as a good model for the blessings bestowed on a person as promised by YHWH, the God of the Covenant.

As a judge, Deborah needed much wisdom in arbitrating disputes among the people. In 2 Chronicles 1:10, Solomon asked for wisdom and knowledge to lead God’s people. It can be imagined that he may have had in mind among the many leaders of the Israelites also his predecessor Deborah and her skill, wisdom and success in leading the Israelites. Deborah, as part of being a judge, settled disputes regarding marriage and divorce, familial relationships, and those between neighbours concerning property, possessions or any matter related to people and the law (Roth 2014:144-174).<sup>193</sup>

Nemet-Nejat (2014a:88) notes that comprehensive studies have frequently likened the Book of Proverbs to ancient Near Eastern societies. The advice offered by Deborah to those in need was realistic and achievable in a society made up of unassuming agrarian

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<sup>191</sup> The West Semitic root word is *špt* from which the Mari documents derive the verb *šapātum* and participle *šāpītum* as well as abstract nouns *šiptum* and *šapītūtum* for the term ‘judge’. In the Bible *shafot*, *shofet*, and *mishpat* are translated as ‘judge’ which, depending on the context, can act as either a verb or a noun (Malamat 2007:539; cf Unger 1988g).

<sup>192</sup> In my opinion, as a representative of God, Deborah, as the deliverer of the Israelites, was also a type of Messiah. A very powerful woman indeed, part of Israelite womenfolk who have delivered very powerful messages throughout history.

<sup>193</sup> Roth (2014:144-174) provides information about women and the law in the ancient Near East that may prove to be insightful on the types of issues that were possibly settled by Deborah in Iron Age Israel. Deborah may have arbitrated complaints related to divorce and the return of a wife’s dowry, property and inheritance, debt, incest, infertility, theft, slander, assault, rape, etcetera (Roth 2014:154-164). Many of the Israelites’ disputes may also have centred on the Canaanite oppression (Higgs 2007; cf Henry 2016).

people (Nemet-Nejat 2014a:88). In an age when marriage and childbearing were of prime importance, she may have reminded wayward husbands brought before her by aggrieved wives of a proverb like the Akkadian: ‘a house without an owner (is like) a woman without a husband’ (Nemet-Nejat 2014a:82; cf Lambert 1960:229, 232-33). She attended to maltreatments and rectified injustices (Henry 2016). Henry (2016) states that Deborah did not judge the Israelites as a princess, a position granted to her by a public authority, but as a prophetess appointed by God. Her arbitrations came from her prophetic ability that emanated from her personal knowledges of YHWH, the God of the Covenant.

Favourable settling of disputes between rivals and the practicality of advice given would have ensured that Deborah’s reputation and fame spread across the Hill Country, strengthening her authority and support basis which were sorely needed in the Israelite war against the Canaanites in Judges 4. As a charismatic leader afforded to her by the title ‘judge’, Deborah’s authority is acknowledged to be greater than that of Barak (Jdg 4:4-5; 5:7-8; Salisbury 2001:79; Gunn 2005:55; cf Emmerson 1989:375).<sup>194</sup> Boling (1996:103) describes Barak as ‘subordinate to Deborah in Ephraim.’ Barak means lightning bolt, a powerful and destructive atmospheric force. According to Reardon (2000), Barak’s name ironically manifests a weak personality. It takes some convincing on the part of Deborah for this bolt of lightning to attack (Reardon 2000). Deborah is the wife of Lapidoth, whose name means torches. Because of her association with her husband’s name, Deborah is an earthly light more steadfast and trustworthy than the transient and unreliable though powerful aerial light of Barak (Reardon 2000).

#### 4.3.7.4 *The wise woman*

Emmerson (1989:376) suggests that the descriptive term ‘wise’ in Exodus 35:25 refers to a recognised role that women occupied in the pre-monarchic period (cf Camp 1981:16; Brenner-Idan 2014:45-46).<sup>195</sup> The wise woman as represented by Deborah in Judges 4:6

<sup>194</sup> Gunn (2005:54) comments that Rabbinic literature refers to Deborah and Barak as judges of Israel collectively. He goes on to note that Barak’s authority (according to the Rabbis), however, was diminished when he refused to do battle against Sisera without Deborah’s physical presence.

<sup>195</sup> Emmerson (1989:376) comments that the women of Tekoa and Abel are nameless and simply referred to as ‘a wise woman’ – *iššāh hakāmāh* (cf Brenner-Idan 2014:34-35, 38-39, 44). It might be that the writer wished the women to appear more distinct by not mentioning their names. Perhaps they are anonymous to emphasise their humbleness and, by contrast, the importance of their message. Whatever the reason, these women were respected and significant enough to convey vital messages.

had a specific function to fulfill in the community. In her role as judge and arbitrator (Jdg 4:4-5), Deborah revealed her leadership skills and wisdom. These are traits that a wise woman would possess (Camp 2009). The wise woman as a vocation is also mentioned in a later era in the Old Testament. The women of Tekoa described in 2 Samuel 14:2 and of Abel in 2 Samuel 20:16, for example, are denoted as wise women (Emmerson 1989:376; cf Brenner-Idan 2014:45-46).

In Judges 5:29, in her song of victory, Deborah uses the word *hākām* (wise) to refer one of the mothers of Sisera's ladies-in-waiting (Hākām 1996, OT Lexical Aids, NIV). The same term *hākām* is used to describe the women of Tekoa and of Abel. *Hākām* is also used to denote diplomats (1 Ki 5:7) and shrewd persons (2 Sm 14:2).<sup>196</sup> Camp (1981:14-15) construes the function of a wise woman as 'one significant political role' women could occupy in the pre-monarchic era.

In this context and as village leaders (cf Jdg 5:7), their oratory skills (Pr 1:5-6; Camp 2009; Brenner-Idan 2014:45-46)<sup>197</sup> and diplomatic abilities lend them sufficient status, authority and respect in their communities to have their words put into effect immediately by the people (cf 2 Sm 20:22; Emmerson 1989:376; cf Camp 1981:17-18). In Judges 4:10, heeding Deborah's message delivered first to Barak in Judges 4:6, the Israelite tribes were assembled to go to war against the Canaanites. In a scene reminiscent of Deborah summoning Barak (Jdg 4:6), the woman of Abel possessed the right to call Joab to her and to issue him with advice regarding a military campaign (2 Sm 20:18; Emmerson 1989:376). In contrast to Deborah and possibly the wise woman in her role as lady-in-waiting to Sisera's mother (Jdg 5:29), the women of Tekoa and Abel were ordinary women. Focusing on research done by Camp (1981:14-29), Emmerson (1989:377) remarks that a wise woman's role stemmed from her role as mother instructing her children. This role was expanded for the education of the people in the community and political decision-making.

Emmerson (1989:376) notes that there is no indication of the presence of the role of wise women after the period of the judges and early monarchy (cf Camp 1981:14). This may suggest that the status and authority held by women under YHWH's theocratic rule

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<sup>196</sup> In the Old Testament, men from other nations had the same attribute: Egyptian wise men in Genesis 41:8, Babylonians in Isaiah 44:25, and Persians in Esther 6:13 (*Hākām* 1996, OT Lexical Aids, NIV).

<sup>197</sup> The oratory skills of the wise women included relating wisdom sayings, parables and riddles (Pr 1:5-6; Camp 1981:18, 20-21).

deteriorated in the ages after Iron 1 as the egalitarianism of that period steadily eroded in the Israelite community (Emmerson 1989:376-377). Camp (1981:26) comments that the qualities of wise women that were necessary to uphold the egalitarian values of the proto-Israelites possibly placed them in positions of authority in their agrarian communities.

#### 4.3.7.5 *Warrior and prophet but never a priest?*

##### a. Reasons for the exclusion of women from the Israelite priesthood

A pre-monarchic Israelite settlement uncovered at Tel Arad revealed modest dwellings. Central to the village was a 'paved courtyard, in the middle of which stood a circular platform filled with bricks and a rectangular stone platform' (Herzog et al 1984:36). The raised platform (probably not a Canaanite *bamah*) was likely an altar 'as may be deduced from the construction of the altar of the later Israelite temple' (Herzog et al 1984:3).

Deborah might have resided in a simple dwelling in Ramah such as the one unearthed at Tel Arad. Her people would have made use of a similar altar or *bamah* for religious sacrifices and rites. The *bamot* are cultic installations on raised platforms built in the open air, situated in towns and the surrounding countryside. They are traditionally associated with the worship of Canaanite deities but were also used for religious ceremonies such as sacrifices and offerings in the YHWH cult (King & Stager 2001:320).

Despite her great authority, a woman such as Deborah would have been restricted from presiding over the sacrificial ceremony at a *bamah*, or more importantly at the Tabernacle. That was the restricted domain of the Israelite priest. According to Leviticus, neither she nor the female descendants of the priest would have been allowed to eat 'specified portions of the sacrifice' (Lv 1:6, 2:2; 3:2; Wegner 2003:453-454). The exclusion or marginalisation of women from specific practices, such as the priesthood in the Israelite cult (Ackerman 2002:48; Chalmers 2012:22; cf Bird 1999:10-20), was the result of structures of kinships in terms of male lineage that decreed priesthood to be inherited from male Aaronic ancestry (see Nelson 1993:97). The patriarchal and patrilineal nature of pre-monarchic Israel and religion joined women's identities to that of her father or husband; therefore, 'it was unlikely that they would hold a leadership position within' the religion (in terms of the priesthood) (Chalmers 2012:23).

In other words, women were not excluded from the priesthood because they were

deemed unworthy by God. Rather, it was the patrilineal descent of the Aaronic priests that made the priesthood a male-designated office (Nelson 1993:97). Because the priesthood could only be passed on through the male line, 'female priests would have created serious difficulties in identifying who was and was not a priest' (Nelson 1993:97). Furthermore, because of their reproductive tasks, women were placed within their households, and since the religion went into the public area, the domain of the male, women's roles within this was limited and they could not occupy leadership positions such as that of priests (Bird 1999:11).

However, women could be prophets because the title was not inherited (Finlay 2004). Women were not excluded from joining the annual feasts and festivals. Acknowledging women's duties at home, under Mosaic Law, women could choose to attend or not attend (Oppenheimer 2009; Baskin 2009). I believe that Deborah's leadership in the Israelite community could also serve as a model for the authority and status available to women in a theocratic society with a heterarchical social organisation that allowed a woman equal status and authority in her community parallel to a man.

#### b. A woman's biological cycle

Another reason for the exclusion of women from the priesthood in Israel was linked to the monthly female biological cycle as well as parturition. The resultant ceremonial uncleanness made women unsuitable for the priesthood since the requirements for the (Israelite) cultic office were religious purity and bodily wholeness (Hayter 1987:70; Marsman 2003:536-544, 569; Bloom 2007:68, 81, 131; Chalmers 2012). According to Phipps (1992:9), 'the Israelites seemed to have held ... that woman could not be priest because their ritually unclean blood flow would contaminate the holy altar' (cf Lv 15:19-33). Bird, however, notes that the exclusion of women from the priestly office (from the second millennium to the first millennium) was not unusual in the ancient Near East (Bird 1999:3-20). As with the exclusion of their Israelite counterparts, Van der Toorn suggests the same requirements for physical and sexual purity placed a prohibition on female priestesses in the ancient Near East (Van der Toorn 1995:2052; cf Marsman 2003:505; cf Lv 17-26). In my opinion, however, this situation was probably more likely true in the major and grand temples of the male gods. Therefore, I am of the opinion that in the lesser



sanctuaries of the high places as well as the sanctuaries of the female deities, (Israelite and Canaanite) priestesses probably existed in the pre-monarchic period. The same scenario might have been possible in the Canaanite priestly office as well (see 4.5.1-4.5.3.1). It might have been that in their household shrines, women performed most if not all the functions of a priest. The authority afforded to women in their households meant that they could perform important cultic rituals such as officiating over the Passover celebrations (Ex 12:3-4) and had significant power to function as priestesses (of Asherah, for instance) in their own women's religion. The theocratic nature of the Israelite social organisation would have given women much autonomy and independence.

Hackett (1998:132-165) comments that times of distress usually create a gap for women in which they can achieve positions of authority. Consequently, the various dynamics operative in the era of the Judges would have lent women a singular opportunity perhaps to achieve status and power that they could not attain in subsequent eras.

Archaeological finds in other locations in the Mediterranean (in addition to the proposed dynasty of priestess found in early Iron Age Crete) may offer parallels for Iron I priestesses in Israel. Carved on an incense altar found in the temple at Khirbet al-Mudayna dated to the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century BC is the following inscription: 'incense altar [fire] made by Elishama for Yoseph/Yesaph Yisaph the daughter of Awat' (Boertien 2014:141). Boertien notes that 'it is remarkable that the altar was made for a Moabite woman and that she's identified by her mother's name ... it is possible that she [the mother] was a woman with special abilities ... an important, influential or powerful person', a priestess perhaps (see Boertien 2014:139-143 for more details about the incense stand)?<sup>198</sup>

#### **4.3.8 High places**

Women in the rural areas of the Hill Country, isolated from the major and secondary temples in the cities, probably worshipped at 'smaller wayside shrines' (Wright 1985:248),

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<sup>198</sup> Among the Etruscans held to be of ancient Near Eastern origin and who documented maternal lineage, archaeological evidence of women priestesses was found. Reliefs on sarcophagi may represent priestesses. Cultic images on the bracelets of an Etruscan queen buried in the Regolina-Galassi tomb at Cerveteri (650-625 BC) may designate her as a priestess. Female family members among three families had the title of Harencu, which may refer to a lineage of priestesses (Dashu 2011). It is possible that these Etruscan priestesses, albeit in a later historical period, may provide an analogy of priestesses in previous eras in the ancient Near East and in Israel.

the Canaanite high places of Baal and Asherah mentioned in the Old Testament (Jdg 6:25; 2 Ki 16:4) that were probably situated near their households (Jdg 6). The worship of these foreign gods was strictly forbidden by YHWH. However, YHWH too was worshipped at these high places or *bamot* to be found near some towns, vales and narrow valleys (see Fletcher 2015b). In Judges 6:25, YHWH compelled Gideon to worship Him on a high place (*bamah*) that was originally dedicated by his father's household to Baal and Asherah. Gideon was commanded to destroy the Canaanite idols and altars and to construct an altar to the Lord in its place.

#### 4.3.8.1 *High places and their installations*

A high place was a raised open-air country shrine (that may or may not have had a proper building)<sup>199</sup> built on 'a wooded hill or ridge' (Wright 1985:249). There female worshippers were met with 'a variety of installations including altars, incense altars or *hammanim*, pillars, sacred groves or poles, corpses<sup>200</sup> and graven images' (DeVries 1997b:380; cf also Nakhai 1994:19; Van der Toorn 1996:252). Canaanite high places were practical indications of the everyday hybrid sacred reality of Israelite women that included 'sacred rocks, trees, springs, etc.' (Wright 1985:248; Jdg. 6:25).<sup>201</sup> These unassuming four-sided enclosures of worship made of coarse stone, ditches and firesides could be transformed to perform various and diverse cultic functions.<sup>202</sup> If in the proximity of a woman's household, they offered her more freedom to undertake her cultic role of worship and interact with the deities as she chose (see Van der Toorn 1996:152).

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<sup>199</sup> Wright (1985:251) is uncertain whether high place shrines in towns included a *beit* (a temple building 'proper' for the deity). He cites the (9<sup>th</sup> century BC) raised platform uncovered at Tel Dan as a 'monumental *bama*' but is unsure if it held a *beit*.

<sup>200</sup> Canaanite high places were possibly also connected with ancestral worship (Fletcher 2015b). Mortuary offerings and related rites to show respect to deceased ancestors, worshipping them and even deification of the dead were part of the cult of the dead practised in the ancient Near East (Domin 2012:4; cf Marsman 2003:578-585). The Israelites and Canaanites shared common beliefs in the afterlife. This included respect of the dead and providing them with a proper burial according to their customs. The Israelites also participated in the cult of the dead as a means of gaining 'favors from the deceased or of placating them' (King & Stager 2001:374, 376). The cult also included necromancy as a means of divination to seek oracles from the dead (Dt 18:10-11; 1 Sm 28). Such practices, however, were forbidden by the official religion (Lv 19:31).

<sup>201</sup> These cultic places are a continuation of the cultic behaviour and customs of the Bronze Age that were transferred into the Iron Age (Wright 1985:248).

<sup>202</sup> This shrine is a description of a Samaritan place of worship resembling the Israelite shrines that have been uncovered. In modern times, the Passover ceremony celebrated at the Samaritan shrine may reflect celebrations at ancient high places (Fletcher 2015b).

#### 4.3.8.2 Women worshipping on the high places

A woman could worship, present offerings and make sacrifices at a Yahwistic altar and venerate YHWH at a (stone) stele or *matzebah* next to trees or wooden pillars (*asherim*) consecrated to the mother goddess Asherah (cf Figure 4.5; see Fletcher 2015b), all in the same enclosure. Though less ornate, rural high places did not lack the cultic behaviour and rites acted out in the statelier city temples. Apart from seasonal sacrifices and offerings, ritual music processions were also held (DeVries 1997b:380).<sup>203</sup> Women could participate in ritual singing and dancing and perform purification rites.

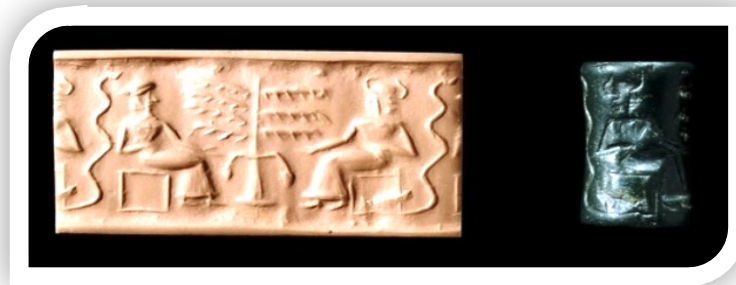


Figure 4.5 Asherah tree (Mesopotamian cylinder seal with clay imprint. The tree in the middle may be the sacred tree associated with Asherah [<http://www.womeninthebible.net/bible-archaeology/ancient-high-places/>])

#### 4.3.8.3 Sit-shamsi – a model of an Iron Age bamah

The 12<sup>th</sup> century Sit-shamsi (sunrise) discovered in Susa (Iran) may represent an Iron Age *bamah* (Fletcher 2015b). The small replica shows two naked figures, probably a priest holding a ritual vessel (cf Figure 4.6) and a worshipper with hands outstretched, engaged in a cleansing ritual. Numerous cultic objects, basins and a big *pithoi* (storage jar) for grain offerings and libations as well as three trees (*asherahs*) and two stele can be seen in the model (Potts 1999:239; Fletcher 2015b). An alternative interpretation of the Sit-shamsi suggests that it is a royal funerary rite held for kings buried in the vicinity (Potts 1999:239). The cultic cairns (ca 3000 BC) discovered at Megiddo may also be representative of a Canaanite high place (Geraty 1973). Geraty (1973) observes that these high places reveal the pitiable way the people worshipped YHWH. The breaking of the covenant with the

<sup>203</sup> From the company of prophesying prophets playing various musical instruments greeting King Saul in 1 Samuel 10:5, it can be deduced that women could go to a high place to consult an oracle and might have done so during the pre-monarchic period.

One True God highlights these deplorable rituals and the ruin of the Israelite community so evident in Judges (Geraty 1973).



Figure 4.6 Sit-shamsi (<http://www.womeninthebible.net/bible-archaeology/ancient-high-places/>)

#### 4.3.8.4 Other examples of high places and places of worship

Among the many high places women could worship were three open-air cult sites dated to Iron Age I and recognised as Israelite (see Nakahi 1994:20, 23). One was located and excavated at Hazor, Stratum XI (11<sup>th</sup> century BC). A second was uncovered on a hilltop in the north of the Samaria hills (12<sup>th</sup> century BC). A stone *matzebah* was found, located in the middle of a circle of large boundary stones together with a bronze bull statuette (Nakahi 1994:20, 23). At Arad (10<sup>th</sup> century BC) a third cult site consisting of a high place and an altar was found (Mazar 1992b:170). However, Nakhai (1994:23) mentions that since the discovery of the Bull site in Biblical Manasseh and the open-air cultic site at Mount Elba, researchers have questioned the sites as Israelite sacred places.

The archaeological record reveals that during the period of the Judges, the sacred places (women) attended were varied and included, for example, a ‘pilgrimage’ shrine (at Shiloh) where the Ark of the Covenant was also housed (Jos 19:51; Jdg 21:19; Nakhai 1994:24). They also ‘worshiped at open air shrines (like the Bull site and Mt Ebal) and slightly later, in at least one village sanctuary (Hazor)’ (Nakhai 1994:24). As mentioned before, the people also worshipped at Shechem (Jos 24:1, 6), at Mizpeh in Gilead (Jdg 21:11), at Mizpeh in Benjamin (Jdg 20:1), at Gilgal (1 Sm 11:15), at Hebron (2 Sm 5:3), at Bethel also at Bochim, according to Judges 3:5; 21:4 (Hirsch et al 1906; Haran 1995:54-56; cf Gottwald 1999:563-567; Ackerman 2016).

## 4.4 WORSHIPPING BAAL AND ASHERAH

The belief and worship of gods and goddesses are as old as time.<sup>204</sup> Equally ancient is the worship of Baal that dates to the time of Noah and the ‘confusion of tongues at the Tower of Babel’ (Gill 1988:23). Baal, the sovereign male deity of the Canaanites and Phoenicians, was not unknown to the proto-Israelites in Canaan.<sup>205</sup> The worship of Baal-peor<sup>206</sup> in Moab in Numbers 25:3 presages an enduring devotion of the Israelite tribes to the god Baal in the book of Judges (Stern 2001a:75-77). Once the Israelites were settled on the Hill Country, the battle between YHWH, the God of the covenant, and the god(s) of the Canaanites for the affection of the Israelites magnified (cf Jdg 2:1-22; 3:5,7; 8:33-34; 17:1-6). This specific spiritual battle was fought particularly against Baal who was also known as a god of the covenants among the Canaanites. Baal-berith, the god of sacred pledges, fertility and rainstorms in his sanctuary at Shechem held a great attraction to the pre-monarchic Israelite men and women in the Book of Judges (cf Jdg 9:27, 46).

Baalism is also an example of one of the popular Canaanite cults venerated by women in the pre-monarchic period, according to the Book of Judges (Jdg3:7; 8:33-34). It

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<sup>204</sup> Religious behaviour has been detected in the earliest population groups; as distant as 300 000 BC and perhaps even earlier. There is support for the close connection between early artistic expression and spirituality as depicted in paleo-art over the past two million years (Leroi-Gourhan & Michelson 1986:6) in many places. Harrod comments that a unique symbol system corresponding to four evolving phases in human society reveals not only animals and hunting rituals, but also features a woman giving birth in one stage that may represent a goddess or fertility rite and in later periods shamanic rituals that involve both men and women (Harrod 2015). This indicates the worship of the fertility cults in ancient Canaan and Israel to have had a long history.

There are quite a few similarities between the shamanic trance state and the trance of a prophet in the ancient Near East and in Israel. According to an androcentric mindset, the creators of such rock art are often thought of as male. However, women are equally artistic and capable of skillful art making and, as evinced by these rock paintings, actively engaged in religious ceremonies. In the absence of writing, it could be that the men and women who painted these images seem to be communicating messages of their religious experiences to others in their group.

These rock paintings seem to indicate the existence of a women’s sacred reality passed on to the many generations of women that came after them. A shared faith in the Divine and hope for blessed and successful reproductive functions appear to be the uniting force. Earlier sacred rites and traditions gave rise to women’s cults for which the archaeological information in Palestine is only now being published (Perry 1999:11-14; Dever 2015:191).

<sup>205</sup> Robinson (2010:26-27) provides definitions of the term Canaanite. Rainey (2007:41-64) explains the external origins of the Israelites.

<sup>206</sup> Some scholars believe Baal was a ‘common name ascribed to the local deities’ of the people in Canaan (Gill 1988:22; DeVries 1997a:79) worshipped by the names of Baal-berith in Judges 9:4, Baal-hermon in Judges 3:3 (DeVries 1997a:79), Baal-peor in Numbers 25:1-9, Baal-hazor in 2 Samuel 13:23 and as Baal-eshmun and Baal-gebal mentioned in ‘dedicatory inscriptions’ found on the eastern and western coastlines of the Mediterranean (Stern 2001a:75). However, Stern and Gill believe that these ‘baalim were the same god worshipped in various guises and with varying coloration’ (Gill 1988:22).

can be imagined that the pre-monarchic Israelite women in particular would have been attracted to Baal as a god of fertility.

#### 4.4.1 YHWH versus Baal and Asherah

Though YHWH as the covenant God of the official Israelite religion was strongly connected with female fecundity and procreation (Gn 29:31, 20:18, 49:25; Jdg 13; 1 Sm 1:5-6), He was not a god of fertility unlike the (carnal) Baal and other Canaanite gods and goddesses (Bulkeley 2011:11-36, 77-100). In contrast, YHWH alone is omnipotent (cf Gn 1:1-31; 15:1; Ex 6:6; 23:20-33; Jos 23:9), omniscient (Jdg 1:2; Jr 1:5; Ps 139:1-3; Is 46:10) and omnipresent (Jr 23:24; Ps 139:7-10; Pr 15:3). YHWH (who was above earthly needs) did not require the intimacy of a goddess consort that could remind the people of the reproductive importance of women and men (see McKenzie 2009:110). Instead He sent His Angel, who was YHWH Himself in Judges 6 and 13, or angels to deliver prophetic messages of future childbirths (Jdg 13:2-5, 9-13; Gn 18:10). These characteristics of YHWH should have been adequate to empower the proto-Israelite women and men, but apparently, they needed much more.<sup>207</sup> It seems that they needed a visible deity in the form of statues and the fertility rites of the Canaanite Baal and Asherah which emphasised and enhanced the worshipper rather than the god. However, in the Israelite official religion, the opposite was true. YHWH valued woman but did not seek her to worship at special fertility rites or to heighten her importance with such rituals (cf Ex 3:13-15; Gn 1:28; 2:18; Pr 31:10-31).<sup>208</sup>

The Canaanite religion, on the other hand, openly acknowledged women's value and reproductive worth in various physical and dynamic ways. YHWH also communicated these principles to His people through His covenantal rule in which the needs of all people, men and women, fertile and barren, as well as the heathen were equally valued (Le Roux 2015; 2016). Perhaps pressurised by an everyday reality of deities, spirits and myth that highlighted the significance of procreation, women needed to accommodate the expression of their reproductivity in sacred foreign fertility rituals and customs. It is also possible that

<sup>207</sup> Ruether (2005:76-78) describes comparisons between YHWH and Baal.

<sup>208</sup> The Bible has received much negative criticism regarding women. I however, believe that the Bible expresses the value of women to extend beyond their reproductive lives.

women wished to emulate the roles and status of the Canaanite goddesses in their own lives through these rites and so gain their own status and influence. Consequently, as mentioned previously, the lure of Baal and his consort Asherah on the Israelite men and women features conspicuously in the Book of Judges (DeVries 1997a:79-80).<sup>209</sup> During this time, worship comprised the veneration of the (Canaanite) state as well as the traditional cult and popular cults of the Canaanites (Davies 1992) in which women were actively involved (Jdg 2; 3:5, 7; 8:33-34; 17:1-5).

#### 4.4.2 The goddess Asherah

Certainly Asherah (see 4.6.3.5), the sacred mother goddess of the Canaanites and consort of Baal,<sup>210</sup> was worshipped (Jdg 2; 3, 7; 8:33-34; see Dever 2005:101). According to Vander Laan (2015), she was venerated near trees and poles known as Asherah poles (cf Jdg 6:25). The pre-monarchic people would have worshipped Asherah as a fertility goddess (Patai 1990:39; see Martins 2015:50). According to Dever (2005:203), Asherah ‘was a full-fledged deity’ who was venerated together with the cult of YHWH or ‘even as part of it’ (see Footnote 279, 280). The cult of Asherah is mentioned in the Ugarit texts (1600-1200 BC) and, comments Walton, Matthews & Chavalas (2000f:182), the worship of Asherah presented the official religion of YHWH with a foremost contending force.

The veneration of the deity was associated with ritual sexual activities, fertility, pregnancy and birth (see 4.5.4; Martins 2015:50; cf Patai 1990:39; Vander Laan 2015; Duguid 1999:112). Worship of Asherah might also have included divination, human or child sacrifice, rituals of appeasement and the usage of idols to manipulate the goddess

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<sup>209</sup> Herrmann (1991:137-138) describes the ‘competition’ between YHWH and Baal. Indications that the Israelites followed the cult of the Canaanites are inter alia found in the numerous cult figurines of male and female deities discovered throughout Palestine in Iron Age II (Stern 2001a:205-208). These figurines may be representative of the pre-monarchic worship of the Canaanite deities.

<sup>210</sup> In Judges, Baal is also associated with the goddess Asherah/Ashtoreth – both names may be variations of the same goddess (Jdg 2:13, 3:7). Asherah may also refer to a sacred wooden pole (Dever 2005:101) carved in her image or a green tree placed near an altar usually used on a high place (*bamah*) (Stuckey 2003:127; Frymer-Kensky 2007:562; cf Dever 2005:101). Ashtoreth may refer to Astarte (cf Figure 4.7), another female deity in the Ugaritic pantheon and Phoenician goddess. In the Ras Shamra texts, three goddesses are identified: Asherah, the mother goddess and consort of El and then later Baal. As such she had comparable rank; Anat, sister of Baal and putative wife; and Astarte who appears not to have had a partner (Tannen 1998). Some scholars such as Lipinsky feel that Asherah in the Old Testament denotes a sacred grove or sanctuary as the term *asherah* in the Hebrew text is the same as the Akkadian, Phoenician and Aramaic words that refer to a shrine or temple (Lipinsky 1972:112).

since these were common cultic practices in the Canaanite religion (see Walton, Matthews & Chavalas 2000f:182; cf Martin 2015:50).

The rite of intercourse involved sacred prostitution with temple prostitutes (Walton, Matthews & Chavalas 2000f:182; cf Westbrook 2011:75; Froemming 2016:26). By engaging in ritual intercourse practices, the people believed that they could influence the gods to bring about successful harvests (see 4.4.3; 4.5.4; Froemming 2016:26; cf Patai 1990:86; McKenzie 1995b:72). Ritual sex also created opportunities for women to occupy the role of priestess in the Asherah cult. The sexual union of Asherah and Baal, which the people believed secured the fertility of the land, was represented by the priestess or priest and the 'sexual union of the worshippers with the goddess with the sacred prostitutes' (McKenzie 1995b:72)

The worship of the Canaanite gods was strictly forbidden by YHWH's covenant that He had made with them (see Walton, Matthews & Chavalas 2000f:182; cf Duguid 1999:112). Nevertheless, evidence for the worship of Asherah is found in the plaque female figurines of the Iron Age I and the pillar figurines (see Figure 4.23) prevalent in the archaeological record of Israel from the 10<sup>th</sup> century BC to the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC (Kletter 1996; Becking 1999:178; Dever 2005:185-186; Sparks 2006:16-21). The figurines are thought to be images of Asherah as 'a nude female, sometimes pregnant with exaggerated breasts that she holds out apparently as symbols of her fertility' (Vander Laan 2015; see also Patai 1990:39; see Footnote 279).

Meyers (2005a:29) remarks that nude female pillar figurines are archaeological evidence of a women's private sacred life in her household regarded by the women as 'vehicles of magical practice that are used in rituals to increase fertility or ensure the health of children' (cf Dever 2005:187; 194). In contrast, Nakhai (2011:350) argues that rather as evidence of a woman's religion, anthropomorphic and zoomorphic statuettes are to be placed in context of 'resident kin groups and not with individual residences'. However, Patai (1990:39) states that 'there is ample archaeological evidence as to the importance of Asherah as a household goddess, a variety of the Teraphim' (see 4.6.3.4; Footnote 279). According to Dijkstra (2001:173), 'men derive their status from their public role in religion and society'. From this we may gather that since, according to Dijkstra (2001:173), women were 'indispensable in the domestic sphere', women therefore gained their status from inter



alia their roles in the household cult.

The mother goddess' nurturing protection would have encouraged the divine feminine in the women (see 4.6.3.5). Her veneration allowed women their own personal religious reality, but it was a women's religion infused with religious elements from the YHWH cult (see Dever 2005:187; cf Dijkstra 2001:165). In the ancient Near East, Asherah was always worshipped as the consort of a male deity.<sup>211</sup> The Israelites followed this example and worshipped her as one of a couple (Stern 2001b:20-29). At Kuntillet 'Ajrud at a 9<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> century BC Israelite temple in the Sinai, inscriptions have been found that allude to 'Yahweh of Samaria and his Asherah' and 'Yahweh of Teman and his Asherah' (Emerton 1982:2-20; cf Dever 1984:21-37; Stern 2001b:20-29; Ruether 2005:74). At Khirbet el-Kom a tomb inscription reads: 'Blessed will be Ariyahu to Yahweh and his Asherah' (Stern 2001b:20-29; cf Dever 1969-70:139-204; Zevit 1984:39-49; Shea 1990:56-63). To my mind these inscriptions are indicative of the syncretic religion practised by the pre-monarchic Israelites (cf Jdg 8:27; 17:3-7). Monotheism was faithfully practised at the Tabernacle in Shiloh by the priests and pre-monarchic people such as Deborah and probably Jael (Jdg 4-5), the parents of Samson (Jdg 13), but contrary to the covenantal principles many people indulged in hybrid religious practices.

Nakhai mentions the paired stands at Tel Halif that resemble those in the royal temple at Arad and 'model shrines understood to be the home of the Divine Couple' as evidence of the worship of YHWH and Asherah (Nakhai 2011:355). Dever (2005:206-207) comments that scholars such as Tikva Frymer-Kensky 'acknowledge the existence of

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<sup>211</sup> Stern (2001b:20-29) writes:

'While YHWH was the god of the Israelites, other nations had their own national gods. The chief god of the Phoenicians was Ba'al. For the Philistines, the chief god was at first Dagon and later also Ba'al (Jdg 16:23; 2 Ki 1:2). For the Ammonites, it was Milkem. For the Moabites, Chemosh. For the Edomites, Qos. And for the Israelites and Judahites – YHWH. Except for the Edomite god Qos, who appears only in the archaeological record, all of these gods are mentioned in the Bible (1 Ki 11:5, 7, 33). Interestingly, while each nation's chief god had a distinctive name, his consort, the chief female deity, had the same name in all these cultures: Asherah or its variants Ashtoreth or Astarte' (Stern 2001b:20-29). Stern continues to say: 'Not only was the female consort the same, the various nations used the same cult objects, the same types of incense altars made of stone and clay, the same bronze and clay censers, cult stands and incense burners, the same chalices and goblets and the same bronze and ivory rods adorned with pomegranates. It was easy to take cult vessels of one deity and place them in the service of another one – and this was commonly done. For example, in the ninth-century BC stela erected by Mesha, the king of Moab, he describes himself as the "son of Chemosh," and tells how he defeated the Israelites (cf 2 Ki 3:4-27). He then brags, "[I] took t[he ves]sels of YHWH, and I hauled them before the face of Chemosh"'.

Asherah as a goddess but not as a consort of Yahweh'. Apparently, Asherah (see Figure 4.7) did not exist as a consort of YHWH in the official religion, but as I indicated above, she was worshipped as perhaps a consort of YHWH or as a deity in addition to YHWH in the popular and household cults. Considering Judges 17-18 and the archaeological finds, it seems that, in the privacy of the Israelite household, the family religion consisted of the worship of multiple deities (Marsman 2003:545), among which may have been Asherah and her consort Baal.



Figure 4.7 Asherah (<http://www.sacred-texts.com/ane/phc/index.htm>)

Since a goddess embodied life and reproduction, essential elements in women's lived experiences, a female deity had an important role to play in the 'daily life of the simple folk' (Paz 2007:115). Accordingly, snakes and sometimes birds (symbols of life and reproduction) which often accompanied the Ugarit and Canaan goddesses (Munnich 2008: 42; Willette 2014a; cf Figure 4.7 and 4.8) might have been esteemed by women as part of their hybrid religion.<sup>212</sup> I believe therefore that the pre-monarchic women in their cultic roles and devotion to the goddess might have made offerings to Asherah and presented her with birds (doves), offerings of food and wine, and burnt incense. It is possible that the offerings of cakes, wine and incense mentioned in Jeremiah 7:18 and 44:19 were made to Asherah as the queen of heaven. It is also probable that this cultic activity date back to the time of the pre-monarchic era.<sup>213</sup>

<sup>212</sup> The dove was the emblem of the mother goddess/es (Asherah and Astarte) in the ancient Near East. Iron Age model shrines from the Levant show doves sitting above the doors of the temples of Asherah and Astarte (cf Figure 4.8; Willette 2014a). A gold plaque from Ugarit (Minet al Beida) shows a goddess standing on a bull, surrounded by snakes (Munnich 2008:52).

<sup>213</sup> Although from a much later period, Jeremiah 7:18 reveals that women prepared dough and baked cakes to the queen of heaven (probably Asherah), while the children gathered wood and the men lit the fires. Food



Figure 4.8 Asherah House Shrine (Iron Age model house shrine representing Asherah, Astarte and Tanit, with doves sitting on top [Willette 2014b])

#### 4.4.3 Baal, the god of fecundity

In the Ugaritic text,<sup>214</sup> Baal is styled as a rain, lighting or storm god (see Figure 4.9; Duguid 1999:112; Smith 2002:76; Fant & Reddish 2008:83) that with his consort Athirat or Asherah secured the fertility of the land, people and their animals (see DeVries 1997a:80 who names the consort of Baal as Anath). As mentioned above, the worship of these gods involved sensual practices which appealed to the carnal nature of the people. This type of worship may explain to a certain extent why the Israelites would forego YHWH's Kingship and His covenantal laws. DeVries (1997a:80) reveals that Baal worshippers engaged in rituals that might have included ritual dancing (1 Ki 18:26); the drawing of blood by cutting the flesh with swords (1 Ki 18:28); the wearing of distinctive cultic garments (2 Ki 10:22);

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preparation and baking were tasks ascribed to women (Jewell 2007:32). Women, therefore, appeared to have taken a primary role in this (women's specific) sacred ritual in which the entire family participated, with the men as tending to the hearth fires undertaking a secondary part. Women would have been particularly interested in baking and eating the Asherah cakes. These small raisin cakes (cf Figure 4.13) were utilised in the process of some magic rituals intended to impact positively upon a woman's reproductive functions. Raisins as produce of the vine were held to be a sign of fertility (cf Nm 13:23). It is possible that Asherah cakes were also made of dried pomegranates as these were also symbols of fertility (cf Macdonald 2008:30; Dt 8:7-10), or perhaps even figs (cf Nm 13:23).

<sup>214</sup> Ugaritic clay tablets found in Syria at Ras Shamra and neighboring Minet el-Beida in 1928 (Hyatt 1942:67) are used as comparative materials to describe the religious practices of the ancient Israelites since the two societies shared much in common (Stuckley 1996:8; Marsman 2003:39). Albright (1940:179) cites the Marseilles Tariff as a source that show 'many important parallels between Canaanite and Israelite temple service and sacrificial rituals ... confirmed for the Late Bronze Age ... by the ritual texts from Ugarit'. Cf Hyatt (1942:67, 70) for a more detailed discussion of the Ras Shamra texts and ancient Ugaritic religion as they relate to the Old Testament. Hyatt (1942:67-75) dates the tablets to the Amarna Age circa 1400 BC. The texts describe a pantheon of gods starting with El, the father of the 70 male and female deities in the pantheon. It refers to El's wife, Athirat /Asherah, the mother of the 70 gods and goddesses. Among the gods the Ras Shamra text mentions is Baal. Baal disposed of and replaced his father, El, as head of the pantheon and take Athirat/Asherah as his wife (Wright 1962:106-107; cf Albright 1940:175-176; Kapelrud 1952:77-78 in Jackson 1984:3).

ritual sex (the men) with sacred prostitutes; as well as the burning of incense. Accordingly, within the Baal cult women might have gained status in their roles as sacred prostitutes, as cultic weavers and as dancers (cf DeVries 1997a:80).



Figure 4.9 Baal (found at Ras Shamra 14-12th century BC)  
(<http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Baal>)

In the Book of Judges, the men and women knew that in addition to his function as a covenant god, Baal was also associated with agriculture (Jdg 9:27; Na'aman 1999:143). As the storm god, the people believed Baal to exert his power over the land, crops and animals by providing all with rain, thereby making the crops and animals flourish (Fant & Reddish 2008:83). Fant and Reddish (2008:83) observe that the allure of being a Baal worshipper wielded a powerful magnetic force on the Israelites, 'for they, too, wanted to ensure the fertility of their crops and livestock, and even of themselves'. Therefore, to procure Baal's favour on their fertility, the people made sacrifices and rituals of appeasement, and as previously stated engaged in rites of sacred sex as they did worshipping Asherah (see DeVries 1997a:80; Walton, Matthews & Chavalas 2000f:182; cf Patai 1990:39; Duguid 1999:112; Martin 2015:50; Vander Laan 2015). Israelite worship of Baal probably also had much to do with the visibility of his image in the form of statues that embodied the carnal nature of his worship as opposed to the invisibleness of YHWH and the spirituality associated with His veneration.

The pre-monarchic tribes were familiar with the bull of YHWH,<sup>215</sup> which was also

<sup>215</sup> Baal was represented by the bull as revealed by the Ras Shamra discoveries (De Vaux 1997:334). De Vaux (1997:334) observes that:

'the mass of the people were bound to confuse the bull of Yahweh and the bull of Baal; they would confuse Yahweh with the cultic statue which symbolized his presence; the door was opened to syncretism and idolatry.'

a sacred emblem of fertility commonly representing Baal (DeVries 1997a:79; cf Perry 1999:14). In the desert, the people had encountered the healing snake bite of the bronze serpent (cf Nu 21:9). As mentioned before (see 4.4.1), YHWH, though not a fertility god, was closely associated with fertility.

The fertility god Baal was also embodied by a snake, another fertility symbol (Witcombe 2000; Munnich 2008:42). An archaeological artefact in the form of a broken Baal figurine ‘formerly standing on a bull’ was found near the sanctuary in Gezer where a bronze serpent (dated to 1100-900 BC) was unearthed, which, according to Munnich, attests to Baal’s association with snakes (Munnich 2008:41-42).

The women and men recognised these sacred imageries when they entered Canaan. A god that secures fecundity (Nm 25:3), the snake<sup>216</sup> and the bull (of YHWH, Ex 32:4), and therefore this familiarity<sup>217</sup> might have facilitated the allure of Baal to the people (see De Vaux 1997:334). In my opinion, the appearance of all these familiar religious features in the Baal cult – that is the powerful symbols of fertility (Baal represented by the bull) and possibly healing/health (the snake) and immortality – proved to be an irresistible influence on the Israelites (Witcombe 2000; Munnich 2008:39-56; cf Fant & Reddish 2008:83).

Furthermore, since the relationship between Baal and Asherah<sup>218</sup> was accentuated by the fertility aspect of the deities (see McKenzie 1995b:72; Walton, Matthews & Chavalas 2000f:182; Westbrook 2011:75; Martins 2015:50; Vander Laan 2015 and Froemming 2016:26), it might have exerted a powerful appeal on women since the

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<sup>216</sup> The bronze snake was an object of ritual worship in the ancient Near East as well as in the Israelite community (cf 2 Kings 18:4). Serpent worship was associated with healing (Munnich 2008:49) and immortality (Ancient Near East: Snake Worship 2017. Concepts.org).

From: [http://concepts.org/index.php?title=Snake\\_worship&section=Ancient+Near+East](http://concepts.org/index.php?title=Snake_worship&section=Ancient+Near+East)).

Bronze serpents dated to 1650-1550 BC and 1250-1150 BC respectively were uncovered at Megiddo. Two bronze serpents were found in the Holy of Holies of Temple H at Hazor dated to 1400-1300 BC and 1300-1200 respectively, two at Shechem dated to 1450-1100 BC and one dated to 1100-900 BC at Gezer (Munnich 2008:39-56 provides a full report and interpretation of these finds).

The bronze serpent (Nehushtan – the Hebrew word for snake), made by the people in the desert and which served as an object of healing, was worshipped after the tribes settled in Canaan (cf 2 Ki 18:14; Shanks 2007:58-63; see also Handy 1995:41).

<sup>217</sup> The Israelites associated Baal with the idea of a covenant god, as the god of fertility and as the storm god (see King & Stager 2001:349). To the people these attributes of Baal would not have been unfamiliar as they were similar terms used to describe YHWH’s power (Gn 12:1-8, cf Gn 25:11; Ex 23:25-26; Dt 28:2-8, 33:26; Jdg 5:4-5; see Marshall 1989:71; McKenzie 2009:110; cf King & Stager 2001:76).

<sup>218</sup> The Ras Shamra clay tablets couple Baal with a female partner, Asherah (Jdg 3:7; Wright 1962:29:32; Jackson 1984:3; New World Encyclopedia contributors 2015). The female fertility component surrounding the religion of Baal is shown by the discovery of fertility goddess figurines also at the Ras Shamra site (Hyatt 1942:71).

representation of the deities' need for marriage and procreation reinforced this vital necessity in women's lives (cf 4.4; 4.4.1; 4.4.2). Consequently, it is possible that the combination of the divine couple's qualities and powers probably undergirded the women's religion practised by the pre-monarchic women in their households (cf Patai 1990:39; Dijkstra 2001:173; Meyers 2005a:29).

In the city of Shechem, Baal as a god of oaths (Baal-berith) was housed within a physical building that was probably beautiful in its architecture to the in all probability awe-struck Israelites, accustomed to worshipping YHWH in a tent-like structure. The significance of Baal-berith as the god of oath-making and his sanctuary in Shechem as the city of covenants (Jos 24:16, 25) would not have been lost on the Israelites. Israelite oral tradition might have described Shechem as hallowed above all the other cities in ancient Canaan (Magen 2007:184).

#### *4.4.3.1 The Baal-berith sanctuary at Shechem*

Situated at the centre of the land (Jdg 9:37) in the Hill Country between the Ebal and Gerizim mountains (Jos 8:30-35), Shechem, dating back to circa 4000 BC (Campbell & Ross 1963:4), was a principal city in the history of the early Israelites (Campbell & Ross 1963:3).

In Genesis 12:6-8, Shechem was first visited by Abraham, to whom YHWH, the God of the covenant, promised the land of Canaan to the patriarch's descendants. Abraham's son Jacob would live near Shechem where the patriarch erected an altar (Gn 33:18-20). These incidents suggest that Shechem functioned as a religious centre in patriarchal times (Na'aman 1999:141).

In Joshua 24:25 the covenant made to Abraham was reaffirmed at Shechem with all the Israelite tribes in attendance. At Shechem the proto-Israelite men and women under Joshua's leadership promised to be faithful to YHWH and not to serve the other gods! It has also been proposed that the Hebrew covenant (Dt 5:2) made to Moses and the people was established in Shechem and not Sinai-Horeb or Kadesh (cf Wright 1971:574).

Consequently, Shechem is assumed to be 'the amphictyonic sanctuary of the tribal confederacy of Israel' (cf 2.2.2; Jos 24:25-26; Rowley 1950:125; Campbell & Ross 1963:3

Na'aman 1999:141).<sup>219</sup> Wright identifies Shechem as a political religious centre 'for league-making where citizens [including non-Canaanites; in my opinion, possibly the Israelites]' resided under 'a covenant'. He refers to Genesis 33:19 where a part of the residents are mentioned as the men of Hamor (whom Wright mentions is a Hivite [Gn 34:2]) or 'the children of the Ass' and based on corresponding material from Mari interprets the term as a confederacy of people (probably non-Canaanite and Canaanite) formed by a treaty and 'formalised by the ritual slaughter of an ass' ([insertion mine], Wright 1971:574-575; see also Na'aman 1999:143).

By contrast, some researchers propose that Shechem was occupied by Canaanites and not Israelites (Fowler 1983:52). Judges 9:1, however, may indicate that there was an Israelite presence within the city (Campbell & Ross 1963:3).

Na'aman (1991:142-143) comments that some scholars believe that Baal and YHWH in the book of Judges are one and the same god (cf Kaufman 1961:138-139). Clements (1968:21-32) and many other scholars, however, disagrees with these theories.

During the pre-monarchic period, the Canaanite city gods Baal-berith and El-berith were worshipped in Shechem (Na'aman 1999:141). It is possible the name and perhaps a syncretic cult of Baal-berith originated from the ancient Israelite tradition of oath-making that goes back to Abraham and Jacob and the title therefore was retained by later generations of peoples both of Canaanite and Israelite backgrounds (see Na'aman 1999:141).

However, some scholars have suggested that the Israelite covenant with YHWH in Joshua 24 was taken from the cult of Baal-berith. Structural parallels are found between ancient Near Eastern and Israelite covenants. Hittite texts are believed to be the model upon which the covenant in Joshua 24 was based (Lopez 2004:72-73; see also Weinfeld 1970:185).

The men and women inhabiting ancient Canaan worshipped at monumental temples in the style of the *migdal* also known as 'tower temples' (Mazar 1992b:167).<sup>220</sup> These

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<sup>219</sup> According to Voegelin (2001:211, 246), 'at the time of settlement in Canaan, Israel had an amphictyonic sanctuary of YHWH at Canaan' (cf Rowley 1950:125; Campbell & Ross 1963:3; Na'aman 1999:141). To some, the amphictyonic sanctuary as a social organisation model is quite acceptable as it would have served inter alia to unite the tribes (see 2.2; Cundall 1965:4:27).

<sup>220</sup> Together with the royal burial cult, tower temples are examples of archaeological evidence of the state cult – in Canaan – during the Middle and Late Bronze Ages (Burke 2011:898).

tower temples were found in numerous Canaanite cities during the time of the Judges, of which the most famous is, according to Mazar, *migdal-Shechem*. Mazar pinpoints this building as the temple in Shechem mentioned in Judges 9:46 (Mazar 1992b:167).<sup>221</sup> As mentioned above, Shechem in the Old Testament appears to be an ancient city even at the time of the Iron Age I. It was an ancient city with a great deal of (Hebrew) religious activity attached to it (Gn 12:6-7; 33:18-20; 35:4; Jos 24:25-26, 32).

Stager believes the fortress temple uncovered at Shechem to be the one mentioned in Judges 9:46 and feels that the temples of Baal-berith (Jdg 9:4), Beth Millo (Jdg 9:6, 20), ‘the temple of their gods’ (Jdg 9:27) and the temple of El-berith to be the same temple that was discovered (see Figure 4.10; Stager 2003:26-35, 66, 68-69). ‘*Berit* is the Hebrew word for covenant thus the temple was for Baal (Lord) of the covenant’ (Wood 2003:277).<sup>222</sup>

However, Na’aman (1999:142) remarks that scholars debate over whether there was only one temple for one deity called now Baal-berith, now El-berith, or if there were actually two shrines; one for Baal-berith and one for El-berith. The latter possibility is accepted on good grounds by many modern scholars.



Figure 4.10. The remains of the Shechem temple of Baal-Berith (in the centre of the photo) ([https://ferrelljenkins.files.wordpress.com/2010/03/shechem\\_baal-berith\\_fjenkins\\_120509\\_032t.jpg](https://ferrelljenkins.files.wordpress.com/2010/03/shechem_baal-berith_fjenkins_120509_032t.jpg))

The Canaanite cult would have been popular with the Israelites who resided in the areas surrounding Shechem (cf Judges 8:33; Campbell 1983:266; Na’aman 1999:141; Gottwald 1999: 563-567). In any event, the co-existence of the Israelites and Shechemites was reasonably peaceful (Nielsen 1955:171; Wright 1971:575).<sup>223</sup> This state of affairs naturally facilitated the adoption of Baal and other Canaanite deities by the Israelites as

<sup>221</sup> Toombs et al (1961:13) as well as Campbell and Ross (1963:1-27) assert that the identification of *migdal-Shechem* in Judges 9:46-49 is problematic.

<sup>222</sup> The Hebrew word *berit* is the only term translated as covenant in the Bible (Hays 1997:177).

<sup>223</sup> Judges 9 seems to indicate that this was not always the case.



their gods.

#### *4.4.3.2 Shechem and the religion of the Israelite women*

As mentioned previously (see 4.2.1.1- 4.2.2.2; 4.3.8; 4.3.8.2; 4.4.1; 4.4.2; 4.4.3), many of the pre-monarchic men and women followed the Canaanite religious practices. Once the Israelites had settled in Canaan, a hybrid religion that incorporated elements from the official religion and foreign cults sprang up among the tribes (King & Stager 2001:298-299; Szpek 2002:81-82; cf Stern 2001a:200-203, 209-210, 265; Chung 2010:124-125). According to the passages in Judges 3, 7 and 8:33-34, the people were disobedient to the covenantal laws and served the Baals and the Asherahs (see 4.4.2; 4.4.3).

In their temples, Baal and Asherah embodied fertility and healing/health, fulfilling two essential functions that permeated women's sacred and secular lives. For these reasons, Witcombe believes the cult of Baal/Asherah to have been associated predominantly with women (Witcombe 2000; cf Burke 2011:903-904).<sup>224</sup> Men, however, also frequented the Canaanite temples and participated in the fertility rituals. As already indicated (see above 4.2.2.1), women could through their cultic activities in the official religion create order out of the chaos in the community, which served to stabilise the community (Harrod 2011:335).

Similarly, I believe that women in their roles within the syncretic popular and household cults (Jdg 6:27; 17:3-5) might have attempted to re-create those covenantal principles and values that they transferred into the syncretic cults as they interacted with the people in their community.

In the religious context, Shechem represented sacred oaths and their (present and future) fulfillment by YHWH to the Israelites (Harrison 1986:572). In my opinion: 1) the people's association with Shechem in their earlier history (Gn 12:6-8; 33:18-20; Dt 5:2; Jos 24:24-26; cf Rowley 1950:125; Campbell & Ross 1963:3; Wright 1971:574; Na'aman 1999:141); 2) their knowledge of YHWH as the God of the covenant; 3) Baal's association with oath-making in the city of Shechem; and 4) the worship of Baal in the popular and household cults (cf Jdg 6:27; 17:3-5) assisted the people in making sacred vows and offerings in fulfillment of the vows to Baal-berith.

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<sup>224</sup> There are intricacies (love and hate) in the relationship between Baal and Asherah, according to Olyan (1988:38-61), that may reflect the complexities in the bond between their earthly male and female followers.

Sacred vows made to Baal might have *inter alia* involved the procurement of fertility health/healing. Consequently, women would have been drawn to pledges and promises of prosperity, provision and protection offered by the idea of Baal as a covenant god to their households, families, children. Thus, knowledge of their rights within a sacred oath (obtained from the YHWH religion; cf Jdg 17:1-2) and given the times in the Book of Judges (cf Jdg 17:6; 21:25), women could likely have made a physical entreaty of a Canaanite deity in his/her temple for a favour. Under YHWH's covenantal rule and probably within a largely benevolent patriarchal system, the spiritual independence, freedom and equality that came with women's roles and status (cf Jdg 1:14-15; 4-5; 13; 14:2-5; 17:1-5) were transmitted into the popular and household cults (cf King & Stager 2001:298-299; Stern 2001a:200-203, 209-210, 265; Szpek 2002:81-82).

As part of this new syncretic religion, pilgrimages were probably made to the Baal sanctuaries some time after the tribes had settled in Canaan. It could also be that women and men devoted to YHWH journeyed to Shechem simply to worship Him as God of the covenant. However, pilgrimages were possibly made by those practising the syncretic cult and, as mentioned above, particularly to the temple of Baal-berith at Shechem, perhaps because of their history with YHWH at Shechem (cf Gn 12:6-8; 33:18-20; Dt 5:2; Jos 24:24-26).

Perhaps these Baal excursions were made in addition to pilgrimages made to the Tabernacle at Shiloh by, for example, some of the Israelite women living in or near Shechem involved in the syncretic cult. Judges 8:33-34 and 3:7 indicate that the Israelites 'forgot' the covenant they had made to YHWH in Joshua 24:25 and pledged allegiance to Baal and Asherah. This they would have done in an effort to appease the gods of the land and by making a pilgrimage to the temples of the Canaanite gods. By making ritual sacrifices and offerings to the gods, the people might have wanted to safeguard their fertility and harvests (see De Vaux 1997:277; cf Marshall 1989:71).

The Baal-berith sanctuary at Shechem (Jdg 9) described below serves as a model for the religious setting of a probable pre-monarchic woman devotee of Baal.<sup>225</sup> Since sacred pledges played a significant role in the lives of pre-monarchic women, the temple

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<sup>225</sup> In modern Muslim societies, a pilgrimage to Mecca (a Muslim holy site in Saudi Arabia) by a Muslim woman or man gives them much authority and a special title, perhaps analogous to more ancient times.

of Baal-berith would have been an appropriate locale for women to make sacred vows or ritual sacrifices and offerings to the deity. The temple of Baal-berith will be styled in terms of the archaeological data and how it may have appeared to the women in the pre-monarchic period.

#### *4.4.3.3 An Israelite's woman's journey to the Baal sanctuary at Shechem*

Women have always had an equal understanding and dynamic involvement in the practices and rituals of their spiritual beliefs (Tedlock 2005:4-5). So too Israelite women in the pre-monarchic period. This would have been true particularly because of theocracy whereby YHWH allowed her the same access to certain roles and status in her community (cf Jdg 1:14-15; 4-5; 13; 14:2-5; 17:1-4).

However, Judges frequently mentions the apostasy of the men and women and the syncretic religion they practised (Jdg 8:27; 11:34-39; 17:1-5). Consequently, along with the company of men, women might also have gone up to either of the two temples devoted to Baal-berith (cf Jdg 9:4) and El-Berith (Jdg 9:46), deities who were 'associated with covenants' (see 4.4.3.1; Wright 1971:575).

Whether or not these women believed Baal-berith and El-berith to have been the same deity or even YHWH Himself (see 4.4.3.1; see Lewis 1996:402), they knew that Baal-berith (lord of the covenant) and El-berith (god of the covenant), as their names implied, served as either part of the treaty or the guardian of the treaty in the covenant<sup>226</sup> (Lewis 1996:403-404; cf Oest 2011:74-75) or any personal oath made to these gods, in my opinion. Mendenhall and Herion (1992:1:1179-1180) define covenant as 'an agreement enacted between two parties in which one or both make promises under oath to perform or refrain from certain actions stipulated in advance' (cf Charlesworth 2011:1-11). Therefore, the women were just as aware of the gravity of their involvement in such a ritual and would not have undertaken it lightly.

Following is a description of the possible religious activities of an Israelite woman in the sanctuary of Baal-berith at Shechem.

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<sup>226</sup> In a 7<sup>th</sup> century BC analogy, the Assyrian King Esarhaddon and Ramataya, ruler of Urakazabanu, name the goddess Ishtar of Arbela and Ishtar of Nineveh as guardians in a treaty (Sommer 2009:13). Steck (2005:1-14) describes covenants in the Old Testament (see also The Pontifical Biblical Commission, 2002; Lopez 2004:72-106).

#### 4.4.3.4 *A woman's supplications to Baal-berith*

Dever (2005:170) comments that the *migdal* at Shechem (see 4.4.3.1) may have been a pre-monarchic Israelite sanctuary appropriated from the Canaanites. However, if the inhabitants of Shechem were made up of only Canaanites (according to Fowler 1983:52), then it follows that the *migdal* would have remained Canaanite and a sanctuary of Baal-berith. A bronze figurine of a standing Baal has been found at Shechem (Tell Balatah) and indicates worship of the deity in the city (Van der Steen 2004:71; Myers 2000:1202). If the sanctuary was Israelite, it was probably a syncretic religion that was practised in the temple. Accordingly, it can be imagined that an Israelite woman worshipper might have made an oath to Baal-berith, petitioning the deity directly in his temple.

Inside the temple of Baal-berith, a barren woman or a woman in need of the god's help possibly began her supplication by addressing him by one or all three of his titles: 'Rider of the Clouds, 'Almighty' and 'Lord of the Earth'. Thus, she extolled him using words similar to those uttered by 'Lady Asherah of the Sea'<sup>227</sup> to 'El': 'Thou art great... Thou are verily wise!' in the Ras Shamra texts (Khalaf 2015).<sup>228</sup> A petition to the god for his consideration of her plight and a request for his help followed the exaltation (Longman 2008:598). A woman in all likelihood ended her plea by making an oath<sup>229</sup> to Baal. The pledge probably contained a self-malediction (that a curse would befall her if she did not meet the agreements of the vow) and if it were reneged upon, the breaker of the promise, in this case the female worshipper, would be a vile sinner against the god (see Tadmor, H 1982:132-133).

Tadmor, drawing upon Mesopotamian custom, remarks that a covenant entered into was sanctified and authorised by an oath, pledged on the life of the treaty deity (Tadmor, H 1982:132-133). For an Israelite, usually the curse of the covenant was his or her own demise (Gn 15:17; Steck 2005:3-4). There is no reason to presume that a personal oath sworn to a deity by an ordinary woman in the pre-monarchic period would be less solemn. This research places oaths in two categories. Firstly, within the context of personal

<sup>227</sup> Korpel (2001:147-148) notes that the goddess Asherah in the Baal-myth is frequently called 'Mistress Asherah of the Sea'.

<sup>228</sup> Worship of Baal is mentioned in the Book of Judges continuously; it may be speculated that Baal worshippers would address the god by these names.

<sup>229</sup> The term *berit* for covenant can also be translated as 'promise', similar to an oath or formal pledge (The Pontifical Biblical Commission 2002).

supplication such as the vow made by Jephthah in Judges 11:30 and by Hannah in 1 Samuel 1:9-11. In both instances, a person was offered to redeem a vow. Secondly, in the context of a people's covenant such as the one in Joshua 24:25 that involved the entire Israelite people.

A woman who made a personal covenant possibly before the idols of the gods (Lewis 1996:404) would have realised the great weight it carried in addition to exposing her desperation in public. An analogy of the solemnity of an oath and the display of a woman's despair may be found in Hannah's vow to YHWH and her tearful confession to Eli in 1 Samuel 1:15. Mosaic Law allowed Hebrew women to make oaths (Nm 30:3)<sup>230</sup> and they were bound to them as much as men were. Therefore, the (imaginary) woman in the practice of her syncretic rituals, now standing in the temple of Baal, would have been aware of this fact.

#### 4.4.4 Worship and prayers inside the temple of Baal-berith

Within the tower temple of Baal-berith, an (Israelite) female worshipper may have either faced or was surrounded by possibly clay, stone or bronze cultic images.<sup>231</sup> These images might have been similar to the 14<sup>th</sup> century BC bronze figurine of Baal found at Ras Shamra and perhaps similar to the naked fertility goddess figurines (perhaps of Asherah; cf Hyatt 1942:71; Wright 1962:29-32; Jackson 1984:3; New World Encyclopedia contributors 2015) known to the people and female worshipper as *ba'alim*, *elilim* and *asherahs*<sup>232</sup> (Scharfstein 2008:474). According to Patai (1990:39), 'statues of Asherah stood in many a local sanctuary'. From this we may infer that statues of Baal and Asherah might have been found in the major temples as well.

To a woman, these carved and molded images embodied the importance of human sexuality and fertility so greatly valued within her society. In what the modern mind

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<sup>230</sup> Oaths taken by single or married women (in the YHWH religion), however, could be invalidated by their fathers or husbands (Nm 30:4-7).

<sup>231</sup> We do not know the cultic practices of pre-monarchic women or how they might have worshipped inside the temples of the Canaanite deities. Therefore, the scenario of a woman making an oath to Baal-berith in his temple at Shechem is purely hypothetical. I have, however, used the archaeological data to attempt to reconstruct the temple of Baal-berith, the vessels that might have been found inside the temple as well as the type of offerings presented to the deity.

<sup>232</sup> Korpel (2001:147) notes that archaeological discoveries of what is assumed to be statuettes of goddesses are usually small figurines.

construes as a remarkably superstitious world, sex and, in many instances, female fecundity were social elements that merited special religious and cultic attention in the Canaanite religion.

Evidence for the veneration of human fertility is found in the cultic sexual icons, as old as 7000, years uncovered in northern Israel at the Ahihud Junction (Gannon 2013; cf Munnich 2008:41, 55). The priapic figurine and the carvings of female pudenda on a (stone) palette may indicate the deification of these parts of the human anatomy (Walker 1983:793-4; Ben-Gedalyahu 2013a) that would ultimately peak in the myths of the sacred marriages of the fertility gods and goddesses in later epochs. The intimate functions of the human body that defined the identities of the men and women of Shechem were spiritualised in a temple, probably such as the one of Baal-berith, through the veneration of the fertility aspect of the god.<sup>233</sup> It was possibly a sense of the divine within (see 4.6.3.5), assisted by her procreation capabilities, that gave a woman the self-assurance to enter the sanctuary of Baal at Shechem and approach the god.

#### *4.4.4.1 Approaching the temple of Baal-berith*

The female worshippers who have come to earnestly pray in the temple of Baal-berith would have walked up to the sanctuary from a courtyard (see Figure 4.11). The courtyard held a huge earthen and stone altar. From there the women would have come up to an entrance located in the east (see Figure 4.5). The doorway was bordered on each side by a square stair tower. A woman would go inside the temple of Baal-berith through a narrow doorway placed in the large long room of the building (Campbell & Ross 1963:7; Mazar 1992b:164-166; Stager 2003:68; Wood 2006b). Clearly visible and ‘attached to the back wall, directly opposite the entrance’ was the holy of holies, denoted by an alcove or an elevated platform that held a statue of the god<sup>234</sup> (Mazar 1992b:164, 166-167). In addition

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<sup>233</sup> Though Judges 9:4 associates the Canaanite god with covenant-making, he was also a fertility god and so served a dual purpose to the woman worshipper. An example of the worship of the fertility god may be found in the sanctuary at Timna. A bronze serpent, a bronze male phallic figurine, a ram figurine and other artefacts were discovered in a Midianite temple at Timna (1300-1100 BC; Munnich 2008:41).

<sup>234</sup> Mazar labels these temples and others like those in Shechem, Megiddo and Hazor as ‘monumental symmetrical temples’ characterised by: the construction of several on ‘raised high ground above their surroundings’, thick walls of more than 2m wide with ‘stone foundations and brick superstructures, entrances’ that are placed ‘along a longitudinal central axis’; they have only two architectural units, the main one (cella), large and either a long-room or a broad-room, and a holy of holies at the back of the cella, a

to this ‘cathedral’ from the Bronze Age, other primary sanctuaries situated in the main urban centres also existed, along with secondary or outlying shrines (and those associated with high places), such as the Stelae Temple in Hazor (Wright 1985:248).



Figure 4.11. Entrance to the temple of Baal-Berith in Shechem. Stone bases on the left and right-hand side of the entrance (indicated by the red arrows). Courtyard is in front of the entrance ([https://ferrelljenkins.files.wordpress.com/2010/03/shechem\\_fjenkins\\_120509\\_30arrows-t.jpg](https://ferrelljenkins.files.wordpress.com/2010/03/shechem_fjenkins_120509_30arrows-t.jpg))

#### 4.4.4.2 *The devotion of an Israelite woman to Baal-berith*

Gottwald describes the sanctuary of YHWH that was located outside Shechem (1999:563-567; cf Campbell & Ross 1963:16). The sanctuary probably also received its share of attendees if indeed it was functioning at the time of the pre-monarchic period. Perhaps the imaginary Israelite woman worshipper, who was praying in the temple of Baal-berith, had visited the sanctuary of YHWH before she made an entreaty to Baal in his temple. Van der Laan (2015) comments that to ensure the fertility of their crops, animals and households, the proto-Israelites probably venerated both YHWH and Baal.

Therefore, it is possible that the people would worship Baal and YHWH at their respective sanctuaries. The imagined worshipper, an Israelite Iron Age I woman, presumably a citizen of Shechem (Campbell & Ross 1963:16) or perhaps from one of the small rural towns in the area nearby, possibly preferred to entreat the god in his grand temple at Shechem. Here she could procure blessings from the Baal priests as well and offer sacrifices to him (cf 4.4.4.4; 4.4.4.5; 4.4.4.6 and 4.4.4.8; cf Jdg 9).

Imaginably, she might have held a Baal figurine or a ‘metal bull statuette’ (Burke 2011:903) in her hand as a votive offering (King & Stager 2001:352-352; cf Van der Steen 2004:71). It is possible that such a female worshipper said a short prayer for a good

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‘façade’ that ‘sometimes had two front towers’ whose height ‘granted access to the roof or upper parts of the building’. Though dated to the Middle Bronze Age, the temples were in use up to Iron Age I, as shown by the temple uncovered in Megiddo (Mazar 1992b:164, 166).

outcome as she walked past the column in the middle of the entrance that buttressed the roof joist of the entrance (Mazar 1992b:164) upon entering the large cella. The walls of the cavernous cella were perhaps decorated like the inside of the temple at Ain Dara with hundreds of magnificently carved reliefs of lions, cherubim and additional mythological creatures<sup>235</sup> (Monson 2000). The temple walls possibly had images of Baal as a man with the head of a horned bull as well as reliefs of him sitting on a throne. In the same way, a Ras Shamra stele characterises a bearded El seated on a throne and accepting worship and offering from a suppliant (Hyatt 1942:73).<sup>236</sup> In other possible depictions of the god on the temple walls, his raised right hand contains a lightning bolt suggesting his fertility and destructive powers<sup>237</sup> (Vander Laan 2015). Such images could also have been depicted in the temple of Baal at Shechem and could have drawn the god Baal further within the woman's reality, inspiring and empowering her.

#### 4.4.4.3 *The sanctity of the storm god*

In a female worshipper's worldview, Baal was the storm god who maintained the life of all people, the god whose might extended over the soil, vegetation and weather. According to this tradition, he was the creator god who provided the rain (a symbol of his seed) for the nourishment and proliferation of man, land and plant; the same was also believed of YHWH (Green 2003:204). With this knowledge, the Israelite woman might have knelt, with her hands raised up in worship and supplication. If she was allowed, her hands would have been raised in prayerful supplication before the statue at the holy of holies in the temple of Baal (Burke 2011:899) to make her petition and offer the god her adoration. As an Israelite, she possibly kept her distance, remembering, from the YHWH cult, the sanctity of this section in the Tabernacle at Shiloh that only the high priest of YHWH could enter. Perhaps the smell of incense from incense altars not unlike the *hammanim* (incense

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<sup>235</sup> Murray (1915:273) describes the interior wall of the Baal temple at Palmyra dated to the Hellenistic Period. This description might grant insight into the interior of the Baal-berith temple at Shechem.

<sup>236</sup> Green (2003:120-127) provides a description of rock carvings of the seated Anatolian storm god worshipped as a bull.

<sup>237</sup> If we are to go by the 'plain façade' (Mazar 1992b:166) of the temple at Shechem, the interior walls could have been unadorned as well, though because of the temple being a principal shrine, it would probably have been decorated to honour and display the glory of the god.



altars)<sup>238</sup> used at the sacred high places emphasised the sacredness of the temple (see Fletcher 2015a; cf Nielson 1986:45).

Other women, in groups or alone, were possibly also kneeling and praying, melodiously chanting incantations to their god. To appease the local gods, they would have placed their gifts and donations of flowers on altars or votive tables (Biran 2003:131),<sup>239</sup> and possibly also bread, oil, flax, water, wool, oil and drink (see Westbrook 2011:75).

#### 4.4.4.4 Offerings to the god

On libation tables women worshippers at the Shechem *migdal* temple conceivably placed drink offerings of wine (Nakhai 2001:43), beer (Borowski 2003:70; Fleming 2004:74) and possibly milk (see also Westbrook 2011:75). At an (equivalent) temple at Hazor, archaeologists discovered a basalt altar in stratum 1 A dated to 1300-1100 BC with an engraving that represents Baal (Munnich 2008:40). It is possible that altar/altars in the temple of Baal-berith at Shechem might have held engravings of the deity, reminding the faithful of the importance of the altars and their dedication to Baal. Libation tables were also uncovered at Hazor (Munnich 2008:40). Cult stands such as the one unearthed at the 1350-900 BC *migdal* temple at Pella (see Figure 4.12) held offering bowls that functioned as altars.



Figure 4.12 The foundations of the Pella *migdal* (the circular impressions are not part of the construction or the foundations [[http://www.astarte.com.au/html/pella\\_s\\_canaanite\\_temple.html](http://www.astarte.com.au/html/pella_s_canaanite_temple.html)])

On these altars women placed meal offerings of bread and cakes (see Figure 4.13). They might have also offered and burned incense on cult stands resembling the one at Pella (see Figure 4.14) in bowls such as the faience bowl found at the Pella *migdal* (in present-day

<sup>238</sup> According to Nielsen (45:1986), some scholars believe the *hammanim* to be incense altars, while others believe them to be incense stands, while still others hold them to be incense utensils placed on altars.

<sup>239</sup> Biran (2003:131), citing Markoe (1985), mentions a Cypriot silver bowl (710-675 BC) depicting flowers presented as offerings by worshippers.

Jordan) or in incense cups (Bourke 2004:16-19, 20, 23). Personal possessions that included (costly) jewellery and fragile stone vessels also served as offerings (Nakhai 2001:30, 40). Jewellery comprised beads, rings, amulets, earrings and bracelets such as those found in the Midianite temple (1300-1100 BC) at Timna (Munnich 2008:41). Perfume, spices, oils, soap, fish, honey, clothes and fabric (Nakhai 2001:40, 42-43), and silver coins (Jdg 17) were presumably also offered. In the temple courtyard, the women brought heftier offerings such as goats, sheep and geese (Biran 2003:131), and probably cattle as well as bulky grain and vegetables as possible payments for their vows (Nakhai 2001:42). In her mix-and-match religion, the female petitioner possibly presented a sacrifice that could have included the animal sacrifice mentioned previously (cf Lv 7:16; Ps 66:13-15) if she was wealthy or another type of offering (Lv 7:16, Nm 15:3; Dt 12:6). Cartledge (1992:12) comments that ‘sometimes the vowing of persons’ as votive offering was made (1 Sm 1:11). If indeed all the woman had to offer was praise to the god in public and if she understood Baal to be like YHWH, then this was probably what she did (Cartledge 1992:12).



Figure 4.13 Asherah cake [reproduction] (<http://www.northernway.org/presentations/godwife/87.html>)



Figure 4.14 Cult stand (incense altar) found in ancient Pella (<http://s1155.photobucket.com/user/aiwn12/media/asherah-pella-x.jpg.html>)

These gifts and offerings created a ‘system of communication in which trust and reciprocity could be built’ (De Vos & Suarez-Orozco 1987:321). As visual symbols of self-denial, gifts which had a special and valued importance in the lives and households of the women were offered (Nakhai 2001:32). They were signs of assurance that their prayers, petitions and requests would be met. It goes without saying that these expensive gifts also represented a woman’s status and authority in the pre-monarchic household and community of the pre-monarchic period.

The light that spilled into the large cella from windows mounted high up in the walls ‘close to the ceiling’ (Monson 2000) was dimming. The women said their final prayers and, given the dangers of the times in Judges, lit the temple lamps (Biran 1986:176) and their own lamps to ward off the evil outside. After the seasonal harvest of grapes, there would be a sacred procession and festival and cultic banquet in honour of Baal. The proto-Israelites intended to be a part of these rituals (cf Jdg 9:27; 21). As an autonomous woman of the pre-monarchic period, an adherent of the syncretic cult might have perceived that she had every right to participate in these religious proceedings even though they broke the covenant arrangement with YHWH.

#### *4.4.4.5 Festivals and sacrifices to the fertility god*

Celebrated as the Feast of Ingathering,<sup>240</sup> the New Year’s festival<sup>241</sup> dedicated to the storm god Baal was held in autumn (Sabourin 1973:70; Van Rooy 1986:231). After the grapes and olives were gathered and pressed, a banquet was held, and gratitude offered to the fertility gods who provided the fruitful abundance of the land (Jdg 9:27). The feast (such as the one mentioned in Judges 9:27) commenced in the vineyards. During this time, the people made and lived in booths of ‘freshly cut leafy branches’ that denoted life and fertility for seven days – the duration of the festival (George & George 2014:162-163). As part of the citizens of Shechem, Israelite (and Canaanite) women assisted in harvesting and treading the grapes. It was an occasion of great joy expressed through dancing by the

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<sup>240</sup> In Leviticus 23:33-34, 39, the children of Israel are commanded to keep the feast of Lord for seven days at the end of the harvest.

<sup>241</sup> There were other minor festivals frequently held during the year at the various temples of the deities (Saggs 1965).

women (cf Jdg 21:21) as well as probably singing and music-making. However, the Canaanite rite not only includes the gravity of ‘prayer and ritual’ but also ‘ecstatic merry production ... intoxication from wine, feasting, nakedness and sex’ (George & George 2014:162-163). From the vineyards, the people moved to the temple of Baal where a great cultic banquet would conclude the festivities indoors (George & George 2014:162-163).

#### *4.4.4.6 Offerings to Baal at the start of the festival*

At the beginning of the festival or sometime before the sacred meal, the people presented a first-fruit offering and a libation to Baal. Hyatt remarks that the types of offerings made at Ras Shamra, peace-offerings, whole offerings, trespass-offerings, first-fruit, wave-offerings, tithes and ‘possibly others [drink-offerings] also appear in the Old Testament’ ([my insertion], Ex 29:40; Hyatt 1942:71; cf Sabourin 1973:70). ‘A baked clay pipe with holes at various levels’ such as the one ‘buried upright in the ground’ discovered at Ras Shamra was used ‘for pouring libations deep into the earth’ (Hyatt 1942:71).

#### *4.4.4.7 The festival makers*

Among Baal’s community of worshippers were devotees and festival makers from all ranks, including noblewomen, priestesses and prophetesses (Marsman 2003:327). Fletcher regards Jezebel as a royal priestess of Baal, a status she inherited from her parents, the king and queen of Sidon, also priests of Baal.<sup>242</sup> As priestess of Baal, Jezebel, for example, was taught to be a leader and issue commands (Fletcher 2006b) from an early age. The royal priestess was, without a doubt, one of many in a long history of women priests<sup>243</sup> in the ancient Near Eastern societies (Marsman 2003:492; Millgram 2008:238; Winter 2010:75), an office that was created by the famous and first-known En-priestess, Enheduanna in history.<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>242</sup> In her authority as a priestess of Baal, she could enact religious decrees and order the deaths of prophets and other people, and it seems she had more power than her husband as a priestess of Baal (see 1 Ki 19:2; 21:7-8).

<sup>243</sup> I would like to propose that the office of priestess did not cease to exist during the Iron Age, evidenced by Jezebel and perhaps the witch of Endor, but that most priestesses went underground or were confined to their households.

<sup>244</sup> The first known bearer of the title En priestess (Renger 1967:118) was the daughter of the Akkadian king Sargon and a high priestess of the moon god Ur circa 2 360 BC (Foxvog & Kilmer 1986:437).

*4.4.4.8 Drink offerings and animal sacrifice in the courtyard of the temple of Baal-berith*

The drink-offering ritual symbolised the watering and fertilising of the land by Baal. Women personalised this sacred and significant act of the impregnation of the womb of the earth, more so if a priestess performed it.<sup>245</sup> Burrowed in the floor of the cella of the Shechem temple are two pits, one of which ‘probably held a liquid substance’ used in ritual ceremonies (Mazar 1992b:165). Perhaps it contained wine from a grape harvest such as the one celebrated in Judges 9:27. In Judges 9:27, the people of Shechem held a feast in the temple of their god (possibly the Baal-berith sanctuary in Shechem) after they had harvested the grapes and trodden them. At cultic banquets men and women drank the wine from ritual vessels resembling the 3000-year-old goblets discovered at Tel Burna (Jarus 2014).

In the temple courtyard (see Figure 4.10), an animal was sacrificed to Baal who the women believed would perpetuate the ‘cycle of birth, growth, fullness, and decay’ (Jaffe 1984:142). In addition, the sacrifice was made to ‘provide food for the god ... assimilate the life force of the sacrificial animal ... to effect union with the deity’ and ‘as a gift to induce the aid of the deity ...’ (Milgrom 1981:764). The blood of the sacrificed animal was likely mingled with the drink offering of wine, poured around the altar placed there by the priests (Ps 16:4; Easton 1997c) or into the earth (Hyatt 1942:71) by the priestess/priest for its regeneration and purification.

1 Kings 16:31-33 mentions the Israelite king Ahab building an altar in the temple of Baal in Samaria (Gaines 2013). This altar was possibly like the 9<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> century BC altar found in the centre of the cultic precinct at Tel Dan. The altar where men and women presented their offerings was a square stone slab with horns (cf Figure 4.15). In the four corners at the top, incense was burned to sanctify an animal being offered. In a sunken jar or jars in the ground, incense ash was deposited by male or female attendants of the priest or priestesses using incense shovels such as the three metallic shovels found at Tel Dan (Biran 1986:181; Jewish Magazine authors 2012).

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<sup>245</sup> Based on Mesopotamian art such as the disk of Enheduanna (Winter 2010:78). Winter, however, states that the chief or ‘En priestess did not herself perform ritual libations; that the ritual sequence began with activities outside of the shrine and then continued inside the sanctuary; that animal sacrifice is’ ... performed out of doors...’ (Winter 2010:76).

Women might have brought their own significant ritual offering of incense, carried in an incense box or holder, preferring to cast the fragrant material onto separate incense burners on special incense altars (Colledge 1986:20) themselves rather than having a priest or priestess perform this sacred action. Incense has always been emblematic of prayer, and the priests and priestesses of Baal offered it copiously to the god at ceremonies (2 Ki 23:5). Incense and other offerings, perhaps oil, spices, herbs and perfumes (Benzinger & Eisenstein 1906) or offerings of a more personal nature<sup>246</sup> (Culican 1980:89; Colledge 1986:20), were presented to the priests and priestesses of Baal before or at the start of the sacrifices. Colledge (1986:21) believes that the men and women on the Palmyrene mosaics are standing with their one hand raised in adoration of Baal. He describes some of the figures with their hands lifted. In both gestures, the palms are extended to the fore. Colledge (1986:21) interprets the figures as raising their hands in prayer and supplication to their god.



Figure 4.15 Horned Altar. From 8<sup>th</sup> century BC Beersheba (Reconstruction)  
(<http://www.womeninthebible.net/bible-archaeology/ancient-altars/>)

#### 4.4.4.9 Music and dancing in honour of Baal

After the ritual sacrifices, the community proceeded to form a religious procession (cf Figure 4.16) that would have taken them inside the temple of the god. As part of a ritual procession, the women (such as the women on the Palmyrene mosaics) may have been ceremonially veiled and involved in the music-making (Colledge 1986:21), singing and dancing that continued until the festivities were over.<sup>247</sup> The lute was a common instrument

<sup>246</sup> Culican (1980:85-101) provides a more detailed description of the Phoenician incense stands that may have resembled the ones used in the imaginary festival described.

<sup>247</sup> Ancient rock art in France shows a mating bison, (at Tuc d'Audubert), a flute-playing human (in Trois Frères) dressed in animal skin and a dancing person with bear paws, animal horns and the head of a horse in

played at festivals by both men and women. A plaque of a lute-playing male dancer at Tel Dan shows what Biran believes to be a dancing movement associated with woman because of the position of the dancer's foot (cf Figure 4.17; Biran 1986:170).<sup>248</sup> This may typify a dance step in a ritual procession that indicates choreographed (women's) dancing as part of the events described in Judges 9:27 (cf Jdg 21:21).

Skilled in playing the lute, woman dancers are also depicted as playing tambourines, double pipes and lyres as may be inferred from 9<sup>th</sup>- 8<sup>th</sup> century BC Phoenician metal bowls and ivory pyxides (see Figure 4.18; Tubb 2003:122). An 8<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> century BC bowl from Crete, for example, displays two groups of women dancers. A bowl from an unidentified Phoenician province shows two women dancers. Another bowl from Olympia in Phoenicia shows three women dancers playing the double lute, lyre and frame drum (Biran 2003:131, cf Markoe 1985:165-166, 238, 349, 204-205, 316; Meyers 2005b:33).

Another example of a woman dancer is a female halil- (pipe) playing dancer on a lamp from circa 9<sup>th</sup> century BC Megiddo (Foxvog & Kilmer 1986:443). Women may also have played other stringed instruments, flutes, cymbals and drums (see Figure 4.19). Greatly prized Canaanite slave girls may have been part of the entourage of dancers and musicians (Braun 2002:85). Dancers were probably trained in a 'guilds of dancers and musicians' hired to perform at religious ceremonies (Biran 1986:173; Braun 2002:86; cf Meyers 2006:247-248).

In the Old Testament (e.g. Jdg 11:34; 21:21), allusions are made to women dancing though few references are made to men dancing (Biran 2003:128), an indication perhaps that certain (perhaps choreographed) dancing within a cultic context was a woman's specific ritual.



Figure 4:16 Dionysiac procession (<http://factsanddetails.com/world/cat55/sub350/item2319.html>)

scenes that are reminiscent of fertility rites (Jaffe 1988:235-237) of the gods and goddesses in the ancient Near East and Israel, which also reveals the continuation of these rituals.

<sup>248</sup> Cf Biran (1986:168-187) for other discoveries at Tel Dan. See also Pritchard (1954, Plate nos., 209, 211).





Figure 4.17 Dancer from Tel Dan (<https://teldan.wordpress.com/israelite-temple/>)



Figure 4.18 Pyxis/Box. Ancient Phoenician Pyxis or ivory box with female musicians  
([http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection\\_online/collection\\_object\\_details.aspx?objectId=282802&partId=1&searchText=mesopotamia&page=60](http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=282802&partId=1&searchText=mesopotamia&page=60))



Figure 4.19 Modern Arab woman with frame drum (photo: Halima Sha)

#### *4.4.4.10 Poets and composers*

Women not only made music and danced but were also accomplished poets who composed hymns to their gods (Foxvog & Kilmer 1986:437; Millgram 2008:238; cf Jdg 5). These sacred accolades would have been sung or chanted at religious festivals (Burgh [sa]; cf



Meyers 1991:23). Among the singers were girls taken from the aristocracy who were also taught to be musicians (Braun 2002:86; cf Fleming 2004:76). Biran suggests that the dancer from Dan wore a mask and states that masks are well known in antiquity (Biran 1986:170, 173). From this statement, it can be deduced that masks were worn in the ritual processions and at the sacred banquets. Phoenician clay masks, including head masks of Baal and Astarte, were found in ancient Israel. Stern reports that the great majority of these are ‘grotesque ... intended to frighten and ward off evil’ some with ‘curious emblems in the center of the forehead’ (Stern 2001c:109-110).<sup>249</sup>

The participants in this procession of Baal were almost certainly clothed in their finest attire. One can imagine clothes to be very important on such prestigious occasions. The (statues of the) gods and goddesses themselves were dressed in the finest array of clothing and fabric that were presented to the priests and priestess as offerings by worshippers (cf 2 Ki 23:7; Noll 2007:61-92). For example, the dancer from Dan wears a short skirt with an ornate band and a decorated cloak, clothing seen on Hittite plaques and statuettes (Biran 1986:170). The same style of dress for dancers and musicians may have endured in the Iron Age.

#### *4.4.4.11 The festive clothing they wore*

Singers and musicians in Iron Age I could acquire a great amount of wealth and prestige (Braun 2002:86) and could naturally afford to adorn themselves in costly apparel. 2 Kings 10:22 mentions the priests, prophets and ministers of Baal decked out in special vestments. To distinguish themselves from the ordinary crowd, priestesses and priests usually wore longer robes and wider sashes and high headdresses (Colledge 1986:21). They might also have sported the tall ‘conical caps with long bands and bull’s horns, the short kilt worn by Baal in imitation of him’ (DeVries 1997a:79; Lurker 2004:27).<sup>250</sup> High-ranking members of the procession possibly wore gold headbands and gold and silver (ritual) pendants as well as other jewellery made with precious stones like those discovered at Megiddo (Braun 2002:86).<sup>251</sup> The wearing of amulets to ward off evil would have been quite appropriate on

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<sup>249</sup> See also Stern (1976:111-118).

<sup>250</sup> Olmstead (1948:180-182) describes a procession on their way to a banquet.

<sup>251</sup> Albenda (1983:83), however, points out that though Mesopotamian women took great care to enhance their appearances, statuettes of women worshippers are bare of jewelry, an indication that in cultic situations

this occasion. Stern (1976:109) notes that Egyptian ‘emblems and motifs’ heavily influenced some of the amulets from the Phoenician ‘popular cult’.

#### 4.4.4.12 *Charming the gods*

Presumably, mostly the woman in the pre-monarchic period wore charms of the Egyptian god Bes, the protector of mothers and children, worshipped also in Canaan (cf Zevit 2001:386, 606). Dijkstra (2001:165) remarks that Asherah and Bes played a significant role in the ‘domestic and local forms of religion’ (see 4.6.1.1; 4.6.3.5).

Faience amulets of the dwarflike god Bess have been discovered at Kuntillet ‘Ajrud (see Zevit 2001:417; cf Golden 2004:195). Since Bes functioned as a fertility and apotropaic deity, it is possible that he was most favoured by women and would have been worn at a sacred festival or depicted on musical instruments (Hadley 2000:139-142).

Female scribes too may have been in the sacred procession leading to the temple at Shechem. Millgram (2008:237) writes that women also served as scribes, as indicated by the Ur III text, a Mari text, etcetera.

It is also possible that Israelite women (and men) wore heavy (eye) make-up, adorned and ‘arranged’ their hair (as described in 2 Ki 9:30) and perfumed their bodies and multi-layered clothing (University of Pennsylvania Museum 2015).<sup>252</sup>

A band of prophets and prophetesses/priestesses accompanied the procession undoubtedly in an excited state (described by the New World Encyclopedia contributors 2015) as ‘shaman like ecstatic dances’. Loud prophetic utterances, revelations of the future and proclamations of divine benedictions came from the diviners. Mixed with the music, singing and the dancing, they made the energetic crowd even more animated (New World Encyclopedia contributors 2015).

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women were unadorned. However, images on three recut Mesopotamian seals, among other the seal of Geme-Lama – a high priestess of Baba in Lagas, show priestesses wearing jewelry (Suter 2007:328). Suter describes high priestesses as wearing ‘fringed’ or ‘flounced robes’ with jewelry, their hair long and loose, and their heads adorned with various headdresses such as horned crowns or circlets (Suter 2007: 325, 330-31, 337; cf Lockyer 1967:19 describing the necklace discovered at Ras Shamra and other items of jewelry that might have been worn by Israelite women).

<sup>252</sup> Jars for make-up were excavated at Shechem. These vessels, like those used by Egyptian women, contained a black mineral powder known as stibium (*khol*), a pounded mixture of antimony and zinc. The powder is applied to the eyelashes to increase the ‘brilliance’ of the eyes and is still used by modern women in the east (Lockyer 1967:18; Brown et al 2006a; Farrar 2013:234).

#### 4.4.5 A cultic banquet

Inside the temple, the high priest and priestess of Baal would initiate the sacred banquet with a prayer. Words spoken between the two deities El and Asherah in the Ras Shamra texts were possibly recited as a litany:

El: 'Why has Lady Asherah of the Sea come? Why came the Creatress of Gods? Art, Thou hungry? Then have a morsel! Or art Thou thirsty? Then have a drink! Eat! Or drink! Eat bread from the tables! Drink wine from the goblets! From a cup of gold, the blood of vines! If the love of El moves Thee, Yea the affection of The Bull arouses Thee!' And Lady Asherah of the Sea replies: 'Thy word, El, is wise; Thou art wise unto eternity; Lucky life is Thy word. Our king is Aliyan Baal, Our judge, and none is above Him. Let both of Us drain His chalice; Both of Us drain His cup!' (Khalaf 2015).<sup>253</sup>

After such an eloquent display of praise, dancing in honour of Baal followed. Ritual dances involved hopping 'around the altar' (1 Ki 18:26; DeVries 1997a:80). Biran describes another style of dancing depicted by the dancers stand found at an 11<sup>th</sup> century temple in Tel Qasile. Similarly, men and women at the sacred meal performed the dance in a line with arms extended to their sides or rotated clockwise in a circle (Biran 2003:129). Perhaps they danced encircling the limestone pillars, a double row of which was situated lengthwise in the vestibule of the temple<sup>254</sup> and which divided the cella lengthwise (Mazar 1992b:167). Soon more robust and sensual dancing developed, and bands of musicians accelerated the pace of their music.

Judges 9:27 might indicate that women too were part of the festival activities in the temple of their god and therefore they too would have been eating and drinking,<sup>255</sup> and perhaps women too were cursing Abimelech. The latter, in my opinion, suggests the occurrence of another cultic ritual in the Baal sanctuary (that is cursing – see 4.3.5). Women, other than musicians, dancers and courtesans, would have attended (cultic) banquets with men given the type of society described in the Book of Judges, particularly if it was a New Year's Festival (see Marsman 2003:327), a 'collective banquet' which all

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<sup>253</sup> Longman states that 'Mesopotamian prayer opens with praise ...' (2008:599). Apart from the Ugarit or Ras Shamra texts, 'not much can qualify as prayer'. For this reason and because of the dearth of 'hymnic literature', we may presume that priests sang (or chanted) the writings from their folklore (Longman 2008:598).

<sup>254</sup> Mazar (1992b:167) mentions this feature in the Shechem shrine as an anomaly that is not found in other tower temples.

<sup>255</sup> It is worth mentioning that in Etruscan art (ca 900-300 BC) – the Etruscans are said to be of Near Eastern origins (Magness 2001:79-117) – there are depictions of women attending public banquets with men (Magness 2001:81). Thus, we may find in the equality and freedom of the Etruscan women a legacy from their Near Eastern female progenitors.

citizens in the company of royalty could join (Head 2013:71). Large amounts of food, probably goats and lambs (see Olmstead 1948:182), ‘livestock, bread ... fruit, vegetables, seeds, nuts ...’ (Head 2013:71) and wine were consumed (George & George 2014:163) from (clay) bowls, juglets and drinking vessels (Horn & Moulds 1969:25-30).<sup>256</sup> Though dated much later, reliefs from Palmyrene temples show ‘bowls, ladles, amphorae, drinking horns [rhytons]’ carried by entourages to a banquet (Colledge 1986:21). At Ugarit, ritual vessels made in the ceramic style of Mycenaean rhytons have been discovered around the sanctuary of Baal; a golden cup and patera (a round libation bowl or drinking vessel) were also found (Schaeffer 1939:20; Van Wijngaarden 2002:120).

Evidence of huge cultic banquets was discovered at Tel Burna in Israel. An enormous quantity of singed animal bones and numerous goblets were found in a large cultic compound that suggests sacrificial rites performed probably in honour of Baal.<sup>257</sup> Women almost certainly also wore the nose masks of which fragments were discovered at Tel Burna. If a similar procession took place at the temple at Tell Balatah (ancient Shechem), these masks may also have served as symbols of the seasonal death and resurrection of Baal. In the Ras Shamra tablets Mot caused the demise of the storm god, which triggered the death of the land (New World Encyclopedia contributors 2015), but Baal, who hid his face for a while, is returned to life and the land regains its fertility. During the course of the festival, one of the principal components – that of the sacred marriage – was re-enacted so as to promote the fertility of the land through the carnal joining of the partakers (Marsman 2003:494-495; George & George 2014:163).<sup>258</sup> Empowered by their sacred identity, the festival offerings and sacrifices, prayers, dancing, singing and eating, the women in the temple of Baal in Judges 9:27 were probably further energized by their

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<sup>256</sup> Horn and Moulds (1969:17-42) report on the vessels discovered at Shechem.

<sup>257</sup> The cultic compound dates back about 3300 years and archaeologists suggest the complex discovered at Area B of the excavation to have been attributed most likely to the worship of Baal. In addition to the large amount of burnt animal bones and drinking goblets indicative of feasts, huge *pithoi* reveal that tithes were brought to the centre or used to store food for cultic activities. At the site, other artefacts such as cups and chalices, fragments of therianthropic (half human-half animal) figurines, an Egyptian scarab and a cylindrical seal were found as well (Jarvis 2014).

<sup>258</sup> The carnal imageries carved on the inside of an Iron Age II Phoenician bronze bowl from Salamis (Cyprus), suggestive of the *marzēah* referred to in the Bible, may also be a representation of a cultic banquet in Iron Age I and earlier. The bowl depicts drinking, woman dancers and musicians, and sexual intercourse between a man and a woman (King & Stager [2001:356] describe the scenery on the bowl).

vital roles as child bearers and mothers to participate and contribute to these final rounds of cultic activities.

#### 4.5 WOMEN'S RELIGIOUS DUTIES IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

##### 4.5.1 Opportunities for a woman's priesthood in the Canaanite cult

Apart from worshipping, praying and attending religious sacrifices, festivals and banquets and making offerings, women also had various other religious tasks and responsibilities within the popular cult. One of the highest stations within the religion could have been that of the high priestess. Women could also fulfill supportive religious roles such as prophets and diviners, professional mourners and, as already mentioned, singers, dancers and musicians (Marsman 2003:487). Women performed many of the same duties in the official Yahwist religion. Therefore, it would have been relatively easy to transfer loyalties and cultic activities from one religion to another since the Israelites periodically strayed from serving YHWH by serving the Canaanite deities. However, I believe that there would have been one cultic duty that might have been possible for women to have, one from which they were officially excluded in the religion of YHWH, and that was the office of priesthood (on the high places and in the household cult).

##### 4.5.1.1 *Facilitating the office of (Israelite) priestesses*

Certain key elements may indicate that it was possible for Israelite women who were participants in the popular cult to have been priestesses of the Canaanite gods and goddesses at their highway sanctuaries:

- The Israelites appropriated Canaanite high places undamaged (possibly together with their priest and priestesses) instead of destroying them (Finley 1996; cf Jdg 2:2; 6:25);<sup>259</sup>
- A hybrid or syncretising religion was practised (King & Stager 2001:322; cf Stern 2001a:200-203, 209-210, 265) that incorporated many features of the Canaanite religion (cf Jdg 6:25; 8:27; 17:5).

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<sup>259</sup> Westbrook (2011:75) observes that both male and female sacred prostitutes were 'attached to the local sanctuaries'. Thus, I believe that it is possible that the priestesses and priests who served at their local shrines would have been appropriated with the sacred buildings by the Israelites.

Israelite women could not serve as priests in the ‘organizational structure of the Israelite religion’ (Ackerman 2002:75), therefore their gifts and abilities were possibly incorporated into their new hybrid religion. Although there is no evidence for female (Israelite) priestesses dedicated to Baal or other deities in Canaan, a strong possibility of Israelite priestesses, however, does exist since women shared in the worship of the gods,<sup>260</sup> as mentioned previously. In serving the Baals and the Asherahs in the Book of Judges (cf 4.4-4.4.5; 4.6-4.6.4.8), women could acquire authority and status as priestesses that they probably could not achieve otherwise. I am aware that there currently is not any concrete proof for the existence of Canaanite priestesses.

#### **4.5.2 The (Israelite) priestess**

##### *4.5.2.1 The priestess as a divine revelator*

There are various theories about the existence of priestesses in the ancient Near East from the second to the first millennium. Marsman views priestesses as ‘one of the most important female religious specialisms’ in the ancient Near East (Marsman 2003:486; cf Suter 2007:318). I propose that the possibility of both Israelite and Canaanite priestesses occurs on the high places and households since the Israelites, contrary to YHWH’s instruction (Ex 23:24), did not demolish the Canaanite high places (cf Jdg 6:25; see 4.3.8.1-4.3.8.4).

Priestesses could seek divine advice and take on the role of diviners. As oracles or the speakers of prophecies, it is possible that the services of Israelite and Canaanite priestesses who represented their gods or goddesses were often in demand.

Deborah (though not a priestess but) as a prophetess of YHWH also delivered a positive revelation about the battle against Sisera to Barak (Jdg 4:6-7); Hamblin (2006:127) relates that in the Epic of Gilgamesh (circa 2150-1400 BC), Gilgamesh (ca 2700 BC), seeking divine advice and support in a military campaign, consulted the high priestess of the goddess Ninsun. The priestess directed ‘divination rituals and presented oracle responses from the gods’ that was more or less analogous ‘to the Pythia at Delphi or the

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<sup>260</sup> Brooten (in Grenn 2008:1) reports on ‘a funerary inscription at the Beth Shearim catacombs’ dated to the later Roman-Byzantine era, ‘which reads *kohenet*, translated... as priestess’. Grenn proposes that ‘female priestesses existed not only while the male *kohanim* were present, but probably long before (the Roman-Byzantine period)’ (Grenn 2008:3; cf Brooten 1982:73-79; Kant 1987:698). Cf Meyers (1983:542-543) for a critique on Brooten.

Sybil at Cumae' (Hamblin 2006:127).

Similarly, it can be imagined that the Israelite priestesses (or prophets) of the syncretic cult (Deborah excluded because of her loyal devotion to the covenant God, YHWH) (cf Jdg 4) may have been approached to reveal divine knowledge about the outcome of military battles. Hamblin (2006:127) comments that 'such divination and the reception of favourable oracles were crucial for any military undertaking' (Hamblin 186-192). The priestesses would have performed numerous sacred rites, including purification ceremonies, to guarantee the security of the military leader and soldiers and their success in battle (Hamblin 2006:127).

#### *4.5.2.2 Additional duties of the priestess*

If the Israelite women were involved in the Canaanite cult, it is possible that they officiated as priestesses of some Canaanite deity and their duties would have included composing and speaking 'prophylactic incantations', producing amulets, altars, ritual jewellery and clothing, lighting lamps, mediating between ancestors and the community, attending births and deaths, acting as scribes (Grenn 2008:4) and the clothing and anointing of the statues of the gods and goddesses (Fleming 2004:74). Priestesses were also drummers and music-makers (Grenn 2008:4; Fleming 2004:74).

#### *4.5.2.3 The diviner of Endor*

Because priestesses could also serve as diviners (Grenn 2008:4), the witch of Endor (1 Sm 28:7-24) might have been either an Israelite or Canaanite priestess/prophetess. Her house possibly also served as a shrine or was connected to one. In the act of baking bread and killing a calf, she was fulfilling one of the duties of a priest/ess: the presentation of an animal sacrifice and a meal offering (Grenn 2008:4; cf Jr 7:18; 44:17-19) to the king whom she recognised as the representative of YHWH or a powerful Divinity.

The diviner of Endor appears to have been well off.<sup>261</sup> Her wealth was probably acquired through her office as priestess and she must therefore have had a large following

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<sup>261</sup> I believe that our impression of this woman has been clouded by her depiction as a crazily mumbling, toothless (old) hag with an unkempt appearance living somewhere in a cave. However, 1 Samuel 28:24 indicates that the woman had a house, some furniture (cf 1 Sm 28:23) and food. She is also not condemned by the writer of the book of Samuel; instead it is Saul who would soon be killed. Noteworthy is the mention

among the people in need of her skills. She seems to have been a woman of some status as the men of King Saul were knowledgeable about her services.

It is possible that Jael (the Kenite) and her tent (Jdg 4:17) served a specific cultic function (Ackerman 1998:73; cf Frymer-Kensky 2002:370; 2009b; Fuchs 2016:61; Conway 2017:25). To speculate what exactly Jael's role and position was in ancient Kenite society might lead to the conclusion that she must have been a woman of unspecific but influential status. The women are bound not only by their acts of courage, but also by their status of wives of their respective spouses (Hackett 1985:27). Deborah is introduced as a prophetess and the wife of Lapidoth (Jdg 4:4). In antiquity, a woman's status was enhanced upon marriage and motherhood. Jael was the wife of Heber, the Kenite (Jdg 4:17). In my opinion, by announcing their marital status, the writer of the narrative wished to emphasise that these were women of certain status, probably biological mothers as well as metaphorical mothers, the latter being indicative of leadership (cf Jdg 5:7; Eves 2002:133)

Hackett (1985:26) ascribes the leadership roles women had in the Book of Judges to the decentralisation of power in this period and 'ad hoc leaders'. This may be true, but there are also spiritual (YHWH's kingship over the tribes, for example) and psychological elements (Gn 1:28; 2:18; the laws of Moses, the religion and cosmology as well as the Israelite pioneer spirit; cf Jdg 18) that encompassed the Hill Country and made the era of the Judges a time of unprecedented opportunities for women to excel.

The fact that Sisera specifically fled to Jael's tent might also be an indication that Jael was a woman of certain authority and standing in her community. She could meet the men (Sisera and Barak) without the presence of her husband or male relatives and therefore comes across as one of the autonomous woman of the Book of Judges (cf Jdg 13:9). The protection she could afford him in this manner was enough motivation for Sisera when he abandoned his chariot to flee on foot to her tent (Jdg 4:15, 17). Jael's possible cultic role (perhaps that of priestess) presented Sisera with enough security to fall asleep in her tent

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of a couch (cf 1 Sm 28:23) (a privilege of the wealthy) that lends further credence to the house as being a shrine and the woman a priestess. Colledge writes about the appearance of sacred couches of Astarte, Bel and priests on Palmyrene mosaics (1986:21). Sacred couches of the Good Goddess were also found in ancient Rome (Langlands 2006:301) and in the ancient Near East dedicated to the deities. Frankfort (1978:297) writes that a king was deified by a goddess (represented by her high priestess) by extending an invitation to the king to 'share her couch'. The offering of the sacrificial meal to the king and seating him on the presumably sacred couch says much about the identity of the 'witch of Endor' who in her fear honoured King Saul as a god.



(Ackerman 1998:73; cf Conway 2017:25)<sup>262</sup> amid his flight from Barak. The most prudent move would have been for Sisera to avail himself upon Heber (the husband of Jael) and the elders of the Kenites. Instead, he sought shelter with a woman who might not have provided him with adequate protection (cf Jdg 4:17). Despite peaceful relations between the Kenites and Canaanites (Jdg 4:17), surely Sisera must have known that the vengeful Barak would come after him. A clue to this riddle might lie in the role of Jael and the function of her tent. Jael might have occupied some religious role and her tent might have served as a shrine (cf Jdg 17:5-13). This might be one reason why Sisera felt safe enough to hide in Jael's tent and fall asleep. In the ancient Mesopotamian society and by extension Canaanite culture and Israelite communities, such impermeability could only be brought about by the gods and the magic rituals related to them (Hamblin 2006:127).

### **4.5.3 The En/Entu priestesses**

#### *4.5.3.1 The Israelite priestess in the household cult*

Though the diviner of Endor did not serve at one of the grand temples of Canaanite deities, the En/Entu priestesses of Mesopotamia offer an analogous study of the religious life of the diviner of Endor and conceivably other (hidden) Israelite priestesses (see Footnote 263). Priestesses may have been present in the household cult of ancient Israelite women, of which the diviner of Endor was but one of many examples. Archaeology has uncovered a whole new religious life among the women in the privacy of their households. Avoidance of the persecution as mentioned in 1 Samuel 28:9 and perhaps even before that time grants feasibility to the idea that priestesses went underground and remained hidden within the religion of pre-monarchic domestic cults.

In Judges 17, the household Levite priest was obviously part of a syncretic cult in which the mother goddess Asherah would have been venerated. Therefore, women in these households probably continued the custom of the female priesthood dedicated to Asherah. The wealth of the diviner of Endor may be attributed to offerings from supplicants at her shrine where she also functioned as a priestess. We are also left to wonder how the mother of Micah in Judges 17:2 acquired her substantial amount of money. Deuteronomy 14:22-26 indicates that agrarian goods, cattle and sheep could be converted into silver by the

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<sup>262</sup> Perhaps he fell asleep on the sacred couch of the goddess that Jael represented (see Footnote 261).

worshippers of YHWH. Thus, silver may have been offered to Micah's household shrine (Jdg 17:5, the shrine appears to have been in existence since Micah had installed one of his sons as a priest) in which the mother officiated over sacred rituals as a priestess or in which she performed some important cultic function as the matriarch of the household.<sup>263</sup>

In the following segments, I will describe the types of priestesses, the offices they held and their selection which might be analogous to the roles and status of possible priestesses in the pre-monarchic period

#### 4.5.3.2 *The office of En-priestess*

Marsman describes En-priestesses in the ancient Near East who may have functioned as the wife or '*dam*' of the god and thus held the highest rank in the female priesthood. En-priestesses occupied quarters connected to the temple of the deity where as the head of the god's household she could manage 'considerable economic resources as well as a large staff of personnel' (Marsman 2003:490-491; cf Breyfogle 1910:407; Suter 2007:319-320, 323).

#### 4.5.3.3 *Electing the priestess*

Acting as intercessors between the deity and the people, En-priestesses also officiated at religious offerings and cultic banquets, praying and singing or chanting hymns. As the '*dam dinger*' or 'wife of the god', the highest-ranking En-priestesses were distinguished from the somewhat lesser ranking '*nin-dinger*' or 'sister of the god'. These priestesses were usually daughters from royal lines (Fleming 2004:76; cf Suter 2007:318). Through the cultic rite of liver-omens, priestesses were chosen<sup>264</sup> and inaugurated into their offices by

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<sup>263</sup> Marsman (2003:489) writes that the role of En-priestesses, of whom the most well-known was Enheduanna, 'the En-priestess of the god Nanna at Ur', appear in historical records from circa 2200 BC until circa 1600 BC. After this period, there are no historical accounts for En-priestesses until Nabonidus, the last king of the Neo-Babylonian Empire (circa 556-539), installed his daughters as Entu priestess (Marsman 2003:489). I support the idea that the tradition of Mesopotamian priestesses in earlier ages was transmitted into the Iron Age Canaanite cult. The religious practices of the earlier Mesopotamian priestesses were naturally adapted to fit the cults to which the priestess belonged. Support for this idea comes from archaeologist Nicholas Stampolidis and his team who have uncovered evidence of 'an Iron Age [dynasty of] high priestess and her protégés' all related, at the necropolis of Orthi Petra on Crete (Bonn-Muller 2010). This discovery may be evidence of the existence of priestesses in the Mediterranean, ancient Near East and in ancient Israel/Palestine in the Iron Age I.

<sup>264</sup> Cf Fisher (2008:71). '*Nin-dinger*' was also the title of the High Priestess of the storm god at Emar (Fontaine 1997:100).

the king (Marsman 2003:490-491). However, at the sanctuary of the storm god at Emar (Tell Meskene in Syria), the '*nin-dinger*' was elected by lot from 'among the daughters from any sons of Emar' (Fontaine 1997:99-100).

#### 4.5.3.4 The '*nin-dinger*'

Fleming notes that the *nin-dinger* may not have been royalty, though she certainly did hail from a well-off family (Fleming 1992:83, 113). A '*nin-dinger*' could be a priestess of male or female deities and 'served both major and minor gods' unlike En-priestesses who were devoted only to principal male deities. The '*nin-dinger*' at Emar became the human consort of the storm god Baal and she, like other priestesses, entered into a sacred marriage with her deity (Budin 2008:17; cf Stuckey 1996:1-8; Suter 2007:323). Marsman (2003:489, 490-492) and Schneider (2011:109-110) regard this relationship as a symbolic marriage that was a cultic ritual re-enacted in the religion.<sup>265</sup> According to Schneider (2011:110), though the true meaning behind the custom is not quite clear, it is one that endured in the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC, albeit with a variation in nature.

Bahrani (2001:137-138) points out that texts dated to the Ur III period describe an 'actual copulation between the goddess (Inanna) represented by her high priestess and the king' or the priest in the cause of confirming the fecundity of the land and procuring its cyclic regeneration. As a means of explaining the annual restoration of plant life to the land, the allegory of the sacred marriage was invented by priests of agrarian cultures (Perry 1999:14). In the ritual of the sacred marriage, Baal was manifested as winter's rainstorm clouds dispensing his 'fertilizing seed' (or semen in the form of rain) 'into the receptive womb of' his 'fertility goddess' (Perry 1999:14). It was this coming together of sky and earth that brought forth the blessing of rain and crops (The New World Encyclopedia contributors 2015).

In the depictions of the En-priestess and the '*nin dinger*' above, it is probable that according to Judges 2:11-13; 3:5-7; 8:33, the Israelite women served the Canaanite gods (Baal in particular) as fervently as the men and probably as ardently as the women in the

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<sup>265</sup> Marsman (2003:494) comments that this cultic rite existed in two forms: as a symbolic and divine marriage between the gods and as a 'carnal' sacred marriage, that of Inanna and Dumizi re-enacted between humans.

Canaanite nations. Since the priesthood was open to women in the Canaanite cult, some Israelite women, in my opinion, might have been initiated into the Canaanite priesthood. They would have willingly, undergone the election ceremonies (see 4.5.3.3.) and performed their priestly duties which naturally would have included the sacred marriage ritual described above. Because the office of the *'nin dinger'* did not require a royal lineage, it is probable that women from non-royal descent might have been enticed by the authority and status afforded serving the Canaanite deities as priestesses.

#### 4.5.4 Ritual intercourse and prostitution

Ritual sex was a direct outflow of the divine marriage of the gods of fertility (Yamauchi 1973:213-222; Stuckey 1996:6). To sustain the benevolence and generosity of their god, participants in sacred prostitution<sup>266</sup> imitated the mythic coupling of a bull (Baal) and a heifer (Anat). With ritual intercourse, devotees hoped to remind, ensure and encourage Baal's duty to fertilise the land (Green 2003:204, 206). Perry (1999:15) describes it as 'suggestive magic' by which the people hoped to 'arouse' the god and 'suggest' that he 'renew his sacred union with the fertility goddess ... and cause the power of fertility to flow into one's fields and flocks'.

Consequently, at the seasonal time of sowing, reaping and shearing, Baal-worshipping (Israelite) men (cf Jdg 9:27) participated in sex with shrine prostitutes (who were possibly also Israelite women – cf Gn 38:6-26; Hs 4:13-14, 18) to assure the fecundity of 'family, flocks and fields' (Perry 1999:15; DeVries 1997a:80). A shrine prostitute, also known as a (female) hierodule or sacred slave, serving at the Canaanite temple of the fertility gods were commonly (women) seized in warfare, (female) children sold by their parents in the course of poverty, or impoverished adults (Perry 1999:15).<sup>267</sup> Though the

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<sup>266</sup> The 5th century BC historian Herodotus recorded the first account of sacred prostitution. The female worshippers of Aphrodite went to her temple to engage in sexual intercourse with any male stranger who requested her. The man handing her 'sacred money' then took her away from the temple for the sexual act (Herodotus, the Histories 1.199; Budin 2008:6).

<sup>267</sup> Budin defines sacred prostitution as 'the sale of a person's body for sexual purposes where some portion [if not all] of the money or goods received for this transaction belongs to a deity'. With reference to classical sources, Budin categorises sacred prostitutes into three groups ('once in a lifetime prostitutes/and or sale of virginity in honor of a goddess', 'professional prostitutes ... owned by a deity or a deity's sanctuary' and 'temporary ... prostitution ... for a limited time before being married or ... [for] certain rituals'). Ironically Budin believes sacred prostitution did not exist because, inter alia, the Greek word 'hierodule' does not

word *ištarītu* is translated as a ‘priestess’ or ‘hierodule’ (Black et al 2000:135), Stuckey questions the involvement of Mesopotamian priestesses in ritual sex (that was transferred to later societies in the ancient Near East. She notes that the Ugaritic texts do not offer any evidence for ‘cult prostitution’ (Stuckey 1996:8; cf Budin 2008:3, 10). Marsman also puts forward the general consensus that most scholars nowadays assume there was no cultic prostitution in the ancient Near East (Marsman 2003:497, 548-551).<sup>268</sup> However, that the authors of the Bible believed in the participation of Israelite men and women in ritual sex is evident in Deuteronomy 23:17, Genesis 38:6-26<sup>269</sup> as well as in Hosea 4 – or that it was possible, to say the least.

## 4.6 HOUSEHOLD RELIGION

### 4.6.1 Introduction

Women’s religious rituals, though they were significantly crucial to households, by and large occurred outside the sphere of male interests and therefore were unknown to the male writers of (ancient and modern) texts (Meyers 2005a:26).<sup>270</sup> In addition to male ignorance, women’s specific cults were overlooked because cultic installations of households where

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necessarily translates as sacred prostitute. Referring to Pritchard (1954:159), Budin feels that the word may also mean devotee or a freed slave consecrated to a god (Budin 2008:3, 26, 29, note 180).

<sup>268</sup> According to Budin (2008:20), scholars who believe in the existence of sacred prostitution in the ancient Near East base their opinion on their analyses of the ‘...terms translated as female ‘cult prostitute’ in the Mesopotamian repertoire: *entu/ugbābūm* (NIN.DINGIR), *ištarītu* (NU.GIG), *kezertu* (MÍ. SUHUR.LÁ), *kulmašītu* (NU.BAR), *nadītu* (LUKUR), *qadīštu* (NU.GIG), and *šamhatu*. ‘However, since the work of Stephen Hooks in his 1985 dissertation ‘Sacred Prostitution in Israel and the Ancient Near East’, and in 1998, with the publication of Julia Assante’s ‘*The kar.kid/harimtu, Prostitute or Single Woman? A Reconsideration of the Evidence*’, it has become clear that these words in the cuneiform corpus actually have no such meaning. The first three titles to be knocked out of the ‘sacred prostitute’ category were *entu*, *nadītu*, and *qadīštu*’ (Budin 2008:20; cf Hooks 1985:3 and Assante 2003:39-45). Maier (2009:268) comments that the Akkadian term *qadīštu* and the corresponding Sumerian word NU.GIG are translated to mean ‘a woman consecrated to a god or goddess’ or that they denote a woman performing some type of cultic service (Maier 2009:268). Babylonian documents do not produce evidence of such a woman being a prostitute. It is probable that the initial meaning of sacred prostitution was attributed to the word because of the cognate Hebrew *qedēšā* (*qēdeshah*), thought to mean ‘sacred prostitute’ because of its use in the context of Deuteronomy 23 and Genesis 38. However, the word also means ‘consecrated’ and it is this clear association with holiness (in addition to the lack of evidence for cultic prostitution in Mesopotamian texts) that is posing a dilemma to scholars (Marsman 2003: 248-551; Budin 2008:21-47; Maier 2009:268; cf Bird 1989:119-137).

<sup>269</sup> In this narrative, a disgruntled Tamar, the daughter-in-law of Judah, disguised herself as a sacred prostitute in order to sleep with her father-in-law so that she may have a child on behalf of her dead husband. In the process, she became pregnant and gave birth to male twins.

<sup>270</sup> Today women led folk religions such as Santa Muerte in Mexico and Shendao in China that fall outside mainstream religions such as Christianity, Judaism, Islam and Buddhism. Allowing women more room for authority. Folk religions with their special rites for healing are concealed from the official religions (Grossman 2015).

women forged their religious identities and experiences lacked the monumental architecture of ancient religious buildings (Wright 1985:250). Included in this unostentatious architecture in which women's religious activities were performed are the community cult corners and private domestic shrines throughout the Iron Age (Willett 2002:34). Responsibilities and work tasks kept women at home and the domestic cult rooms and shrines were accessible and expedient places of worship. Here they could pray, worship and make vows and present offerings to the deities of their choice (Nakhai 2011:357; Willett 2002:34-35). Women also probably owned cult figurines that played an important role in their sacred beliefs and rituals. Though these cultic practices were against the covenant the people had made with YHWH (cf Jos 24:24-26), I believe that covenantal principles were transferred into the syncretic household cult. Consequently, women's roles and status in the household cult became valued and could have been viewed by the people as equally authoritative as the cultic roles of men in public. Within the variant (benevolent) patriarchal system (see 2.4.1.1 a, b, c; 2.4.1.2), some women occupied cultic roles in their households because of the covenantal principles that granted them their autonomy and equality even though they were not faithful to YHWH's covenantal rule. In the following segment, I will attempt to investigate women's roles, status and worldviews within the syncretism of the household cult.

#### *4.6.1.1 Women's control of the household religion*

Women's sacred reality involved continual petitioning of the household deities for their benevolence and guardianship over their families (Willett 2002:34). In a world where magic and religion were intimately intertwined, a woman's religious reality was most probably suffused with superstitious beliefs and rites (as well as cult figurines, jewellery and amulets) that were established on her lifecycles and involved her menstruation, conception, pregnancy and childbirth. A woman would carry out spiritual rites most likely in all the rooms of her dwelling (4.6.1; 4.6.2.1; 4.6.2.2; 4.6.2.3; 4.6.2.4; 4.6.2.5; 4.6.2.6; 4.6.3).

By transforming each room into a 'sacred space' (Meyer 2005:11), the proto-Israelite woman ensured all the components in her life were blessed and healthily functioning. Those sacred spaces under her control she kept protected from evil forces

through the placing of sacred figurines and the wearing of amulets (Willett 2001; Meyers 2005a:29-35). In so doing, purity and order within her homes were maintained (Faust & Bunimovitz 2003:29; cf Van der Toorn 1994:45, cf Ebeling 2010:74-75). She created a safe domestic environment, conducive to her reproductive life. Contrary to the legitimate monolatrous religion practised in Shiloh (and the other places) and later in Jerusalem (Wright 1985:250), the cultic behaviour of women in the privacy of their households displayed a syncretistic nature (King & Stager 2001:322, 339; Jdg 17).<sup>271</sup>

This is attested by finds of (pillar box) cult figurines, apotropaic ritual emblems of the Egyptian deity Bes,<sup>272</sup> and the evil eye used by women in their rituals (cf Meyers 2005a:29-35), for example. In the Old Testament, the household shrine of Micah and his mother in Judges 17 offers a model of the Canaanite cultic features inserted into the Yahwistic religion. Following is an examination of the type of house inhabited by a woman and her family that grants insight into the secret sacred spaces occupied by women in their households.

#### **4.6.2 The household – the dimensions of sacred space**

Wright describes household shrines as architecturally unimportant because they lacked definite shape being alterations or versions of the building they were associated with (Wright 1985:250). However, it may be assumed that the basic principles of sacred proportions and orientation by which the Tabernacle was built were adhered to in the household architecture.

The sacred architecture of the households reflected the religious beliefs of the men and women in the pre-monarchic community (Faust & Bunimovitz 2003:29). It indicates that the form of the building in which they housed themselves and their cultic installations was important. The Israelites preferred the four-roomed house as a private dwelling (Faust & Bunimovitz 2003:29). Occupying it, the inhabitants were immersed in the ideals

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<sup>271</sup> Smith comments that there were many polytheisms in ancient Israel including the worship of El, Baal and Asherah (Smith 2001:116-147).

<sup>272</sup> Dever (1984:25) notes that 'crude representations of the ithyphallic dwarf god Bes' are found on Pithos A, one of the two pithoi that mention YHWH and His Asherah at Kuntillet 'Ajrud. Bes was related with the erotic features of the Canaanite fertility cults and in Iron Age II his status as an apotropaic deity was widespread in Syria Palestine. Miniature Bes faience amulets are often found in Iron II tombs (Dever 1984:25). Cf Zevit (2001:388); Sparks (1998:141); Hadley (2000:137) and Brinker (1946:23).

‘embodied in the dwelling’. Their presence in the house could also ensure the continuation of sacred values such as the sanctity of life and health, for example (Faust & Bunimovitz 2003:29).

Women also contributed to safeguarding the perpetuation of the household religion in a more tangible way. In the Book of Judges, financial assistance by the mother of Micah, for example, inordinately enhanced the interior and sacred landscape of the household shrine (Jdg 17:4).

#### *4.6.2.1 The sacred environment of the four-room house*

The four-room house (see Figure 4.20) was an architectural expression of a family’s sacred values (Faust & Bunimovitz 2003:29). It represented a type of ‘non-verbal communication’ that spoke to the larger society of the religious values of ‘holiness, unity and order’ and thus represented the absence of unholiness and chaos of the people who lived there (Faust & Bunimovitz 2003:29). In other words, since the four-room house could accommodate and structure the laws or conduct of behaviour, the dwelling could facilitate the obedience of its residents to the numerous Biblical laws that had to do with holiness and order (Faust & Bunimovitz 2003:29). The four-room house also reflected the ‘cosmological beliefs’ of the Israelites. Consequently, women, as they went about performing their cultic ritual in their houses, probably believed that the eastward orientation of their dwelling enhanced their religious performances and opportunities for blessed reproductive cycles and family life. The Hebrew word for east (*qedma*) or forward and the west (*ahora*) or backward may explain this belief (cf 5.2.3.1; Faust 2001:129-155; cf Faust & Bunimovitz 2003:29).



Figure: 4.20 Ancient four-room house (replica)  
(<http://ancientart.tumblr.com/post/55887623235/a-full-scale-replica-of-an-ancient-israelite-home>)



#### 4.6.2.2 *The niddah (a menstruating woman)*

The floor plan of the four-room house during Iron Age I facilitated a woman's times of ritual purity and piety (Faust 2014:80). The four-roomed house was divided into three long rooms by pillars and a broad room at the rear (cf 5.2.2.1; cf Netzer 1992:193-201). All the rooms on the ground floor were approached via the main room. It has been suggested that the house was designed particularly with the back rooms in mind because of the privacy they allowed menstruating women and women giving birth (Willett 2001; Faust & Bunimovitz 2003; Ebeling 2010:70; Faust 2014:80).

Women's sacred rituals were easier to perform in the privacy of these rear rooms. In the seclusion of these back rooms, women could possibly come together to compose, choreograph and rehearse their sacred hymns and poems, dancing, singing and music undisturbed (cf 4.3.2.8 a, b, c, d). The privacy of these rooms also meant that a *niddah* (a menstruating woman) was not compelled by her religious laws, although it imposed restrictions on her (Faust 2014:80), to depart from her house in contrast to other Near Eastern women.<sup>273</sup> The floorplan of the house allowed her to remain in the house while allowing the other family members to keep to the laws of purity (Faust 2014:80). She remained concealed in a separate room at the back for the duration of her cycle and relieved of her daily tasks such as food preparation and the serving of it (Faust & Bunimovitz 2003:29, Meacham [leBeit Yoreh] 2009). In her solitude, the time of a *niddah* consisted of rest and probably private praying and devotion (Fletcher 2006c).

#### 4.6.2.3 *Sacred rites of the niddah*

I believe that conceivably magic pain-relieving herbal potions for physical discomfort, linen towels possibly scented with apotropaic incense and special foods full of magical nutrients that acted as tools of dispelling the presence of evil spirits were given to the *niddah*. The *niddah* was initiated into the special world of women and their rituals as soon as she reached puberty and began menstruating (Fletcher 2006c; cf Ebeling 2010:68). A

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<sup>273</sup> Dawson reports that the Ugarit texts do not have any details with regard to traditions and folklore about menstruation. 'Near Eastern traditions viewed menstruation as a liminal time, perhaps even as profane and sacred', in contrast to the Old Testament. She goes on to note that 'women had fewer menstrual cycles in ancient times, with the late onset of menses, bearing of children, breast-feeding, questionable nutrition, early onset of menopause, and shorter life spans, ancient women's 'moon cycles' may not have taken place monthly with any regularity, especially when compared to today's norms' (Dawson 2009:105-106).

sacred rite and celebration marked this phase in her life, perhaps one that included singing and dancing and the burning of incense to consecrate her to YHWH and the mother goddess Asherah (Fletcher 2006c; Ebeling 2010:68).<sup>274</sup> At the end of the 7 days of menstruating, she ended her ritual uncleanness, perhaps washing with detergents (Jr 2:22) made from plant extracts (King & Stager 2001:71).

#### 4.6.2.4 *The purification rite of the niddah*

The Iron I house in pre-monarchic Israel does not display bathing installations. A terracotta figurine, however, of a woman bathing in a bathtub, discovered in an 8<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> century BC Phoenician tomb, confirms the custom of bathing (see Figure 4.21; King & Stager 2001:70-71; Tischler 2006 60-61; Ebeling 2010:71).<sup>275</sup> To complete her cycle, a *niddah* may have bathed in a pool outside (Ebeling 2010:71). However, there is a stronger possibility that she may have washed in a pool of rain water collected in a container on her rooftop (2 Sm 11; Gruber 2000:156) given the restrictions placed upon her by her cycle. It is possible that after her bath she was anointed with precious oils and clothed in her finest dresses (Ruth 3:3; 2 Sm 11:2, 4).



Figure 4.21 Woman in a bathing tub  
(<http://www.bibleodyssey.org/en/tools/image-gallery/b/bathing-woman-figurine.aspx>)

Perfumed oils were often associated with cultic rituals and worship. I believe that it would have been relatively easy to make scented oil in her home because the basic

<sup>274</sup> Witcombe believes (based on Jeremiah 44) that it was mainly women who practised the Baal/Asherah cult. According to Jeremiah 44:17, the women, supported by their husbands, burned incense and presented drink offering to the goddess which may refer to the pre-monarchic period. This secured the goddess' good will and they did not suffer any kind of deprivation (Witcombe 2000).

<sup>275</sup> Further evidence comes from 8<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> century BC century ceramic washbasins unearthed in Samaria and elsewhere in ancient Israel (Ebeling 2010:71), a bathtub discovered at 9<sup>th</sup> century BC Tel Dan and from the start of the Iron era, cisterns coated with a lime mixture uncovered in the private Israelite house (Gruber 2000:156).

ingredients (olive oil, honey, milk and various salt as well as resins or flowers for fragrance) were at hand (cf Rubin 2005). In some strange way, the mixture acquired magical properties and was stored in a jar for continuous ritual use (Rubin 2005).

#### *4.6.2.5 The mystic bond between women*

The *niddah*'s clothes may have been infused with incense smoke (I have observed Arab women perfuming their clothes with incense smoke to dispel evil spirits which, I gather, is an ancient custom derived from days gone by) and to bless her next biological cycle. This recurring cycle was undoubtedly spiritualised and transformed into a secretive and mystic event. Such a mystical occasion obviously brought women together and established a bond between them that involved the sharing of knowledge and sacred mystical rituals centred on their reproduction lifecycles, family lives and sacred beliefs (Meyers 2006:248).

#### *4.6.2.6 The mystic rites of women*

The proto-Israelite women's specific rituals were probably accompanied by prayers and incantations of sacred texts<sup>276</sup> (Trachtenberg 1939:154), the wearing of jewellery (strung beads), the application of oils and potions (as types of apotropaic anointment; Ebeling 2010:71-74), and the placing of figurines as apotropaic devices (Nemet-Nejat 1999:92; Willett 2001; cf Meyers 2005a: 28, 33, 38, 41-45, 51). Demons and evil spirits inhabited every corner of the world the proto-Israelite women lived in. These evil entities could interfere with all aspects of their daily lives, even in the kitchen. Therefore, jewellery and accessories to ward off the powers of wicked entities are frequently found with cooking utensils and weaving equipment (Willett 2001). Among the finds at 8<sup>th</sup> century BC Tell Beersheba, Herzog mentions various 'domestic vessels, figurines, bone and metal tools as well as a stone altar'<sup>277</sup> (Herzog 1992b:224; cf Albertz & Schmitt 2012:80-84). Also, at Beersheba, cult objects were found in the culinary, food storing and weaving spaces of women in houses – specifically in the vicinity of an oven and cooking vessels, a lamp and the fragment of a zoomorphic statuette were found (Willett 2001).

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<sup>276</sup> Writing and reading occur in the Book of Judges (8:14).

<sup>277</sup> These objects were found in a complex of three pillared buildings at 9<sup>th</sup> century BC Beersheba in Stratum II. Although these structures functioned as public buildings rather than domestic (Herzog 1992b:223-224), the cultic-related artifacts might be indicative of the type used in private dwellings.

### **4.6.3 Cultic corners, worship rituals and fertility figurines of the sacred goddess**

#### *4.6.3.1 Cultic corners*

Where relevant, the household gods may have been placed in a small worship room set aside for cultic purpose within the residence (see Figure 4:22) or in an external cult room fixed to the building. Alternatively, a specific space in a courtyard or a room in the house that had some other primary purpose functioned as a cultic corner (Jdg 17:4-5; cf Zevit 2001:123, 654). Wright records the 10<sup>th</sup> century BC domestic shrine at Megiddo V A as the most famous case in point. An alcove in a corner of the courtyard was created as a cultic space possibly with an altar on each side and ‘contained a coherent collection of cult objects’ (Wright 1985:250; cf Hitchcock 2011:322; Dever 2012:269). Analogues from the Levant indicate cultic corners such as the domestic shrine at Megiddo to be distinguished by several architectural features: ‘partition walls’ or alcoves to demarcate an area; platforms, benches, plastered walls and a space set in an angle of a room for cult objects (Loud 1948:45-46; Willett 2001; Zevit 2001:220-225). Domestic shrines at Tel Masos that fit these architectural features have also been uncovered at Beersheba, Tell el Far’ah, Tel Halif, Tell en-Nasbeh and Tall al ‘Umayri (Willett 2001; Nakhai 2011:353; Dever 2012:266-270; Davis 2013:101).

#### *4.6.3.2 Archaeological evidence from the Levant*

Archaeological evidence from the Levant of worship at domestic cult corners include ‘tubular vessel stands, offering stands, portable altars for incense offerings and other small offerings’ (see Figure 4.22; Hitchcock 2011:322; cf Vriezen 2001:54–55; Finkelstein, Mazar & Schmidt 2007:177). House shrines belonging to the 10<sup>th</sup> century BC have been found at Tel Tanaach and at Lachish, where a horned altar and cult stands were discovered (Wright 1985:250). It may be presumed that at their domestic cult corners, women presented their offering of foods and drink, burned incense, prayed, said incantations, made vows either alone or in groups in which they probably performed sacred dances, sang hymns and celebrated major life events.



Figure 4.22 Alcove (in left wall) with household gods (<http://ancientart.tumblr.com/post/55887623235/a-full-scale-replica-of-an-ancient-israelite-home>)

#### 4.6.3.3 *Worship rituals*

At 10<sup>th</sup> century BC Tell el-Far'ah specifically, women's religious activities in their houses are clearly illustrated by finds in courtyards that include shards of female figurines and liquid offering vessels along with weaving tools. The courtyard niches here witnessed women's prayers and invocations, libation offerings and the burning of incense and oil to invoke the guardianship of the domestic goddess (Willett 2001). Witcombe notes that the worship of the mother goddess was a basis of support and comfort to women in a time when they suffered life-endangering risks associated with childbirth, for example (Witcombe 2000).

Dever (2012:270), in reference to the sacred household actions at Tell Halif, comments that 'the wives and mothers were probably the real experts at the household shrines' (see 4.6.3.1; 4.6.3.2).<sup>278</sup> Though concrete evidence does not exist for it, possible examples of women cultic experts may be found in the character of Micah's mother as the matriarch of the household (cf Jdg 17:1-4). Dever (2012:269) describes the cultic artefacts at Tell Halif as including a couple of female figurines as well as two standing stones and an offering stand together with cooking vessels (storage jars, jugs and juglets, cooking pots, plates and bowls and grinding stones, among others). These finds indicate that the women made offering to the household gods – food and drink in order to gain their blessings on

<sup>278</sup> Contemporary analogues of women-dominated religions are found in the practice of folk religions such as Santa Muerte in Mexico and the USA, Spiritism in Brazil, the folk religions of China (e.g. Feng Shui) as well as in Africa where a worshipper can be both a Christian and a devotee of a folk religion (cf Grossman 2015).

their fields, animals, as well as ‘continued fertility’. Religious rituals of the women also included the ‘consecration of everyday utensils’ and ‘prayers to the goddess for the conception and safe rearing of children’ (Dever 2012:270).

#### 4.6.3.4 Fertility figurines

Female figurines that may have been among the household shrine gods (the *teraphim*, see Footnote 279; cf Patai 1990:39) of Micah and his mother in Judges 17 were of great importance to the daily domestic cult rituals of women (see Figure 4.23). Also included in the array of sacred statuettes utilised by women are zoomorphic and anthropomorphic figurines (Ackerman 2008a:127-158; Nakhai 2011:350). Numerous plaque statuettes belonging to Iron Age I are of a naked female figure with her hands ‘pointing at her breasts or sometimes at her womb’ and may represent the worship of a household fertility goddess (Astarte or Asherah) on account of her care for pregnant women and young mothers (see 4.4.2; 4.6.3.5; Tadmor, M 1982; Winter 1983:96-134; Keel & Uehlinger 1992:110-122; cf Sparks 2006:17).<sup>279</sup> As apotropaic devices, women probably attached certain beliefs and powers to them that would benefit biological reproduction and health. Perhaps the women believed that sacred powers of protection emanating from the cult corner permeated the entire house. These powers were amplified by positioning consecrated figurines of deities at the entrances to kitchens or courtyards, and before entryways that led to the rooftop and internal room and women’s workstations (Willett 2001). Evidence of such ritualistic actions are found at ‘entrance courtyards 36 at Beersheba, front rooms 93, 94 and 443 at

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<sup>279</sup> Cf Sparks (2006:16-21) for additional information regarding the two types of plaque figurines from the Late Bronze Age (and Iron Age I) associated with the goddesses Astarte, Asherah and Anat. Dever (2005:185-186) reports on the physical appearance of these statuettes and the goddess they represent. Becking (1999:178) observes that these female statuettes are rare finds in the archaeological record of Iron Age II. From the 10<sup>th</sup> century BC, Judean pillar figurines are dominant as cult artifacts. Discovered at Tell en-Nasbeh, Tel Halif, Lachish, Tel Masos and elsewhere in ancient Israel, they are primarily pillar figurines characterised by voluminous breasts cradled by hands of the goddesses (cf Figure 4.23). Stern (2009:205) associates the figurines with the female fertility deity Astarte who at times is portrayed playing a frame drum. However, quite a few scholars (such as Dever 2005 and Kletter 1996) have identified the figurine as the fertility goddess Asherah (Dever 2005:187). The *teraphim* (in Gn 31:19; Jdg 17:5; 18:14,17; 18; 20; 1 Sm 15:23; 19:13,16; 2 Ki 23:24; Ez. 21:26; Hs 3:4; Zch 10:2), translated as household gods, have been connected with the Asherah pillar figurines because of their use in magical fertility rituals that would classify them as *teraphim* (see Lewis 1999:847, 844-850 discussing the *teraphim*, Dever 2005:179-181; also, Willett 2002). In Micah’s shrine (Jdg 17:5), he installed a silver idol, an ephod, other idols as well as a Levite priest, all indications of the syncretic household religion which also reflected the infusion of the Canaanite cults in the wider social cult (see Szpek 2002:81-82).

Beersheba, 314 and 42 at Tel Masos, and 440, 335, 327 and 436 at Tell el Far'ah where figurines and votive vessels were found as well as raised structures for cult offerings' (Willett 2001; cf Willett 2002:37).



Figure 4.23 Judean pillar figurines Clayton (2014c)

#### 4.6.3.5 *The power of Asherah*

According to Judges, in the household cult the Israelites accepted a pantheon of deities (see 4.4.2; 4.4.3), of which the mother goddess, most likely Asherah,<sup>280</sup> was the most endearing to a woman in her 'private devotion' (Bird 1986:310). Women made a very empowering commitment to the goddess. The mother goddess was the protector of women. Upon women rested the task of the continuation of the family and the nation. The worshipper being able to procreate became like the goddess, sacred and powerful. To perpetuate this flow of life and sacredness between her and the divine mother goddess, a woman therefore needed to worship the goddess (Bird 1986:310) and to channel this sacred flow of life and benevolence towards a women's specific concerns, namely reproduction and health. A plethora of cultic objects such as figurines, amulets, beads and pendants, Bes figures, lamps, shells, model chairs, special clothing, things in specially chosen colours and more were employed in special rituals in the rooms of the houses in efforts to invoke the goddess' protective and restorative influences and powers of good fortune (Nakhai 2011:355-356; cf Willett 2001; Willett 2002:37).

Ruether (2005:90) comments that in Asherah the feminine principle that imparts wisdom and spirituality which was appropriated into YHWH's identity would have

<sup>280</sup> According to Frymer-Kensky (1992:155, 159-161, 201), the asherah was a cultic installation but also the name of a Canaanite female deity. 'As Athirat, she was one of the three prominent goddesses of Ugarit, the others being Anat and Astarte' (Frymer-Kensky 1992:156, 160; cf Dever 2005:186).

connected her to the Israelite female. Frymer-Kensky (1992:20) notes that women could fashion their own roles in society in the character of the goddess. Although she indicates a decline in the status of the goddess in a secondary role and supporter of the male order (Frymer-Kensky 1992:20), echoes of her 'power' (Frymer-Kensky 1992:17-19, 47) can be seen in Deborah, a typecast of the might of the mother goddess who connects to God, serves as a mediator, is a receiver of His power and who leads her people to military victory (cf Yen 2003).

#### **4.6.4 Divination and magic**

The mixture of cultic ideologies within the religious beliefs of women during the period of the Judges in addition to the archaeological evidence is best represented by the wise woman as prophetess of YHWH (in the image of Deborah, for example) and the wise woman as a diviner and caster of magic spells (in the image of the witch of Endor in 1 Samuel 28). I would like to distinguish between prophetesses of YHWH (Exod. 22:18; Leviticus 19:31; 20:6; Deuteronomy 18:10), who practised an unadulterated faith according to the laws and prohibitions set out in Leviticus and Deuteronomy, and those prophetesses who practised a mixture of both Yahwism and the other religions of ancient Canaan (Ez13:1-6; cf Marsman 2003:560-561). The former and the latter are emblems of women 'acting in a widespread popular cult in an official capacity, and ... occupying the leading position' (Peritz 1989:140; cf also Willett 2002:40-41).

In both cases, their prominence is highlighted by the attribution of certain 'powers' (of divination) possessed by these women. It is possible that the domestic religion was left in the hands of women as attested to in ancient Near Eastern writings inter alia because of the mysterious power they had to affect their sacred and secular reality (Van der Toorn 1994:45).<sup>281</sup> The intermingling of the sacred and secular is evident by women's application of the following items in profane and ritual functions: collectables (figurines), luxury pottery, chalices and goblets, miniature vessels, lamps, cups and saucers, rattles (used as toys and ritual music), cosmetic items, incense ladles and game pieces (used for personal recreation gaming and for the casting of lots for magic purposes (Albertz & Schmitt

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<sup>281</sup> The witch at Endor displayed the power of a necromancer in bringing up Samuel from the dead (1 Sm 11-14).



2012:75). Many of these artefacts were found at the Iron I settlements at Ai, Megiddo (10<sup>th</sup> century BC) and Lachish (Albertz & Schmitt 2012:75).

#### *4.6.4.1 Women who healed and ancient rational therapy*

Though few are mentioned, women could be ‘doctors’ or traditional healers as indicated by a second millennium Mesopotamian tablet (Nemet-Nejat 1999:108). Mark (2014) notes that there were more female physicians in Sumer than in any other society before the advent of the Akkadian empire. The names of male or female physicians are not recorded in the Old Testament, but the profession is mentioned in 2 Chronicles 16:12 and Jeremiah 8:22 (Mounce 2016b). It is possible that women could work as healers in pre-monarchic Israel, particularly since the men were often away fighting in battle. We are not certain whether women did function as traditional healers or physicians, but it was highly likely as they would know different herbs and plants and had to deal with accidents and other problems in and around the house.

It can be imagined that women like the mother of Samson, concerned about their fertility and reproduction as well as family health, might have been strongly motivated to discover and develop an intimate knowledge of the medicinal properties of the plants, herbs and trees that grew in the area (cf Gn 30:14-16).<sup>282</sup> I believe that women were familiar with the land and hills (cf Jdg 11:37). Since they were collectors of wood and plants, fruits, herbs and vegetables for domestic use, women were aware of the medicinal qualities of the plant life in the hills. They probably also knew how to treat various (minor) injuries and ailments. Consequently, women would have been the suitable substitutes, in the place of physicians, to treat ailments and administer herbal remedies within the sphere of the household (Indiana University 2016. Medicine in Ancient Mesopotamia. From: <http://www.indiana.edu/~ancmed/meso.HTM>).

It is most probable the women who applied rational therapy (medicine that did not involve magic spells or rites)<sup>283</sup> to their injured and sick family members at home. It is possible, therefore, that certain women in the household or community were instructed in

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<sup>282</sup> Mandrakes is also mentioned in Canticles 7:13, probably to encourage fertility in the relationship between the woman and Solomon.

<sup>283</sup> Ritner (2001:326) remarks that there are two categories of ancient Egyptian medical practices: rational therapy (‘medicine’) and the use of incantations and rites (‘magic’). In certain instances, magic and rational therapy were combined in a manner that was complimentary (Ritner 2001:326).

the curative aspects of plants and were trained in the application of medicinal treatments. I propose that as was the case with certain women's specific tasks (for example, weaving and bread making), instruction and training in healthcare was probably the result of the generational transmission of information from one group of women to the next. The transferal of medical knowledge included the laws that dealt with hygiene and prophylaxis which 'were intended for the welfare and preservation of the nation' (Muntner 2007:721). 'Medical laws contained inter alia recommendations for frequent bathing, stringent dietary and hygienic rules, the deterrence of epidemics, quarantine, regulations for sexual intercourse and taking care of the skin ...' (Muntner 2007:721).<sup>284</sup>

#### *4.6.4.2 Medical treatment in the household*

Medical treatments included sterilising and bandaging wounds and treatment of minor injuries and those ailments with obvious and external origins (Nemet-Nejat 1998:78; cf Ritner 2001:327). Nemet-Nejat (1998:78) comments that people (in ancient Mesopotamia) could recognise the natural causes of illnesses that stemmed from prolonged exposure to heat and cold, over-indulgence in food and alcoholic beverages, as well as contaminated food. For these observable illnesses for which the origins were known, rational therapy was used (Nemet-Nejat 1998:78). Consequently, the female healer in the pre-monarchic era used the rational therapy as prescribed in the Bible (Muntner 2007:721) to cure those illnesses that required straightforward treatments and possibly simple injuries resulting from ordinary fractures, for example (Ritner 2001:327).

As in ancient Mesopotamia, Israelite households were probably the main centres of medical care (Indiana University 2016. Medicine in Ancient Mesopotamia. From: <http://www.indiana.edu/~ancmed/meso.HTM>).

Analogous to ancient Mesopotamia where the family acted as the principal care givers in a domestic setting (Indiana University 2016. Medicine in Ancient Mesopotamia. From: <http://www.indiana.edu/~ancmed/meso.HTM>), the women in the pre-monarchic era treated their patients at home. Like ancient Mesopotamia, Israelite patients were possibly

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<sup>284</sup> Muntner (2007:721) remarks that these and other provisions total 213 laws of a medical nature that deterred the Israelites from contracting many of the diseases that were widespread among the surrounding nations.

also cared for near rivers or springs of water since it was believed that water had therapeutic powers (2 Ki 2:20-22).<sup>285</sup> This would also have been an effective way to temporarily quarantine or isolate someone with a contagious disease.

The treatments that women might have used to treat various ailments include the application of cakes of figs to boils (Is 38:11), the use of garlic, rue for medical purposes, probably wine to clean and disinfect wounds, and olive oil to soothe pain (Mounce 2016b). Myrrh, cassia, sweet cinnamon, niter and galbanum<sup>286</sup> were also used as medicines (Muntner 2007:721). Washing was very important. Infected clothing and utensils were sanitised or destroyed by burning or boiling in water, people encountering a corpse or suffering from discharges were purified, those with contagions were isolated or quarantined, and infected houses were fumigated and cleansed (Muntner 2007:721).

#### *4.6.4.3 Medical knowledge*

It might be conceived that women's entire lived experience may have been consumed by concern for their families' wellbeing, fertility and reproduction. Similar to the ancient Mesopotamian and probably Hebrew physicians, female healers presumably treated many problems peculiar to women specifically such as infertility, miscarriage and gynaecological ailments (Scurlock 2014:121). In the earlier ancient Egyptian Kahun Papyrus (ca 1850 BC), physical examinations number among the six treatments to find out if a woman could conceive (Ritner 2001:327).

It is possible that the Israelite female healer also possessed this type of information (cf 4.6.4.1; 4.6.4.2). Consequently, an Israelite wife might have undergone physical examinations to determine if she could conceive (Ritner 2001:327). Saxey (1978:123) notes (women had) knowledge of folk medicine comprising healing practices 'included bandages (cf Teall 2014:6), splints, oils, poultices, and a variety of herbal remedies such

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<sup>285</sup> It is probable that families would commit ailing family members into the care of priests at Shiloh or those priests in their household shrine (cf Jdg 17:17:10) as was the custom in ancient Egypt where people were treated by the temple 'physician-priests' (Ritner 2001:326). These ancient Egyptian priests used both rational therapy and magic (Ritner 2001:326). It can be concluded, therefore, that as the Israelite household shrines probably practised a syncretic religion (cf Jdg 17:4-5), the priest might have employed both types of healing as well. It appears that priests of the wealthy household shrines had to be paid a stipend (Jdg 17:10); therefore, healthcare in less well-off families was probably left in the hands of the women in the household.

<sup>286</sup> Galbanum (cf Ex 10:34) is a gum from a plant that grows in Syria and Arabia, one of the ingredients used in the holy incense (Bible Hub 2016. Galbanum. From: <http://biblehub.com/topical/g/galbanum.htm>). Niter is also known as potassium nitrate (salt).

as Balm of Gilead’.

They would have been confronted with the various diseases mentioned in the Old Testament such as dysentery (2 Chr 21:18), atrophy (Job 16:8), fevers, heat stroke, inflammation, consumption (Dt 28:22; Lv 26:16), boils, tumours and festering sores as well as itch (Dt 28:27), blindness [possibly ophthalmia neonatorum or trachoma] (Mounce 2016a; Dt 28:28), leprosy (Nm 12:10-13; Lv 14:1-57), obesity (Jdg 3:17), skin diseases and worms (Mounce 2016a; cf Muntner 2007:721). These conditions were believed to have been sent by God who could also bring about healing (Dt 32:39; Mounce 2016b; Borowski 2003:74-77). A healer, consequently, was ‘spiritually endowed’ by God through whom he could effect the cure (Muntner 2007:720).<sup>287</sup>

A woman with the knowledge of herbal medicines and trained in the art of healing possibly acquired a good deal of authority in her community. Considering the Israelite ideology, such medical expertise might have been considered supernatural (Muntner 2007:720). It is also possible that the female healer always used only rational therapy.<sup>288</sup> Biblical rational therapy did not ‘involve incantations or magic rites’ (Muntner 2007:721). However, the Israelites displayed a marked proclivity for the Canaanite religions, as indicated in the Book of Judges. Consequently, a female healer’s medical skills might have comprised Biblical rational therapy (and the covenantal laws given to them by YHWH) as well as some ancient Canaanite magic-religious practices. Her knowledge of the latter, however, might not have been as extensive as that of the traditional healer (see below).

#### *4.6.4.4 Magic healing*

##### *a. Background to magic healing in pre-monarchic Israel*

In the superstitious world of the ancient Near East, it appears that every mishap (including disease and infertility) that befell married couples, individuals and young people in a family

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<sup>287</sup> Muntner (2007:720), however, attributes this divine gift of healing specifically to male physicians in Biblical times. However, we may speculate that women too were imbued with this gift in YHWH’s rule (theocracy), and particularly since the men were continually going off to war.

<sup>288</sup> The use of only rational therapy was possible in the ancient Near East as indicated by Nemet-Nejat (1998:78). Although from an earlier period, the Edwin Smith Papyrus, an ancient Egyptian medical text dated to circa 1550 BC, contains primarily rational therapy. There is one exception, Case 9, for which magic was also recommended in addition to rational therapy (Ritner 2001:327).

was attributed to sorcery.<sup>289</sup> It can only be imagined how eagerly counterbalances were sought through the magical arts (Scurlock 2014:101-108).

Parallel to the Israelite communities (women such as Hannah and the mother of Samson followed covenantal principles by seeking YHWH for a cure for their infertility. Other women faithful to YHWH such as Deborah probably sought YHWH's assistance with other health-related problems. However, the Book of Judges records that many times the people, Micah and his mother, for example, sought after other gods, which may have included magic healing. In Mesopotamian societies the prevention of diseases and treatment and cures of ailments were in the hands of the many gods and the physicians associated with them. Jastrow (1898:246) remarks that 'medicinal remedies' were 'never dissociated' 'from the appeal to the gods'. The Mesopotamians believed that the recitation of formulas held magical power that secured the efficacy of the medical potions offered to the sick (Jastrow 1898:246).

The preoccupation with their health led ancient Mesopotamians to fill their physical, religious and specialist environment with the architecture of sacred groups, temples and shrines and vocations devoted to human health (Yeomans 2016; cf Mark 2014). Therefore, it can be deduced that the Israelites brought their sicknesses and health problems to the priests at the Tabernacle at Shiloh (cf Lv 4; 13; 1 Sm 1:9-10). The priests, however, did not have authority as physicians, but they did supervise and impose the laws pertaining to communal hygiene and healthiness (Muntner 2007:720).

Sickness was viewed as punishment sent by the gods for an offense or sin (cf Ex 15:26, 23:25, Lv 26:14-16; Bottero 1992:168). Similarly, the Israelites considered physical ailments to be the consequence of mortality or sin (Dt 28:15-45; Nm 12:10-15). God acting

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<sup>289</sup> Scurlock (2014:101-102) reports that according to ancient Mesopotamian texts, adolescent stress, physical diseases and ailments were related to a specific class of demons, the *lilû*, *lilîtu* and *ardat lilî* who were young people diseased just prior to marriage or shortly afterwards. Scurlock mentions that a Mesopotamian text records the female demon *ardat lilî* as the cause of Gilles de la Tourettes, an illness that affects boys in the first two decades of their lives. These demons harassed young girls of the same age as well. The ghosts of dead relatives, to correct some wrong, may also be sent by the gods to plague family members (Mark 2014). The ancient Egyptian Ramesseum Papyri (P. Ram) records a range of ailments treated by the medical specialists inter alia 'exorcisms of afflicting ghosts' (Ritner 2001:324, 332). Like the ancestors in Africa, in ancient Israel the dead were also thought to 'offer both benevolent and malevolent powers'. They were worshipped and considered a source of knowledge (Simkins 2011:9) Jastrow (1898:180-187) describes animism in the Babylonian cult and refers to 'disease and pain bringing spirits' (Jastrow 1898:183, 246, 259).

in His role as the ultimate healer sent both sickness and cure in response to sin and penitence (Saxey 1978:123; cf Muntner 2007:720).

This ideology regarding illness would have affected the anxiety of a woman for her health and the wellbeing of her household. It would have increased the desperation of a barren wife. As such they may have paradoxically been led to break God's laws concerning seeking outside help or magic healing instead of consulting the prophet or priest at Shiloh for healing. Communal pressure might have forced a sterile wife, for example, to turn to magic-religious practices. These were inherent in the Canaanite religion that infused the Israelite society as portrayed in the Book of Judges (Jdg 2:11-13; 3:5; 8:33; 10:6; 17:4-5; Brenner-Idan 2014:68; Chavalas 2016).

From the passages above, it is easy to infer that although they were forbidden from participation in any form of occult practice (Dt 18:10; Gilboa 2007:346; Muntner 2007:720), magical practices in everyday life (as well as in Israelite healthcare) were probably very commonplace (Brenner-Idan 2014:68). According to Chavalas (2016), evidence of these practices can be found in the use of clothing (2 Ki 2:13-14), magical staffs (Ex 7:9) and references to hands (2 Ki 5:11), hair (Jdg 16:17),<sup>290</sup> mandrakes (Gn 30:14-18), spells (Jos 10:12), whisperings (2 Sm 12:19) and the various blessings, curses and dreams. Chavalas (2016) comments that the examples above were derivative magical practices that were adopted from foreign religions.

#### b. The woman traditional healer

Women in a superstitious society could naturally become prominent in their communities if they had knowledge of herbs, potions and magic including incantations, spells and rites for healing all sorts of physical and spiritual problems.

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<sup>290</sup> Human hair in ancient Mesopotamia and Israel acted as a symbol of strength. The supernatural qualities of hair are evident in the story of Samson whose strength is said to have been in his long hair (Jdg 16:17-19). Dhunda (2015) comments that in ancient Mesopotamia, young men sacrificed their beards and women their hair to the Syrian goddess. They would place their hair in silver or gold boxes imprinted with their names. Ancient Rome and Greece had similar practices of hair sacrifices. Dhunda (2015) clarifies that hair was perceived to be a source of strength and 'vital genital energy' at puberty, which explains the importance of hair in antiquity.

Like the (male) physician in ancient Mesopotamia and the magic-medico practitioners in ancient Egypt (Ritner 2001:323-324), the traditional healer<sup>291</sup> used a combination of herbal medicine and magic (Scurlock 2014:110, 121).<sup>292</sup> It is possible that the traditional healer (both man and woman) had an equipment box probably resembling the medical/magician's box discovered in an ancient Egyptian burial shaft.<sup>293</sup> The equipment box in which she stored the tools of her trade was probably easily transportable. Traditional healers presumably incorporated many of the ancient Mesopotamian therapeutic practices that were transferred into the Canaanite society and which were also adopted by the Israelites during the period of the Judges (cf Jdg 17:4-5; Jastrow 1898:47, 696; Gilboa 2007:346; Scurlock 2014:101-143). It can be imagined that the 'idolatrous tribes' of Israel may have adopted some of these healing practices.

Allan (2001:377) remarks that the ancient physician did not occupy a prominent

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<sup>291</sup> The traditional healer probably had in-depth training that allowed her to combine different pharmacological ingredients to treat a variety of ailments. Spiegel and Springer (1997:74) record a mixture of numerous homoeopathic plants and mineral constituents and various medications blended with alcoholic, milk, honey brews as well as broths, and animal parts and fats. Medical training also involved studies of magic, specific incantations, spells and rites and their application to an ailment. The Ramesseum texts, the Ebers papyri [ca 1550 BC] from ancient Egypt (Ritner 2001:324; Inskeep 1969:23) and ancient Mesopotamian texts (Scurlock 2014:110, 121; Teall 2014:1-6; Spiegel & Springer 1997:69-89) include both rational and magic medicine (Ritner 2001:324). It can be deduced that the traditional healer would have incorporated both therapeutic methodologies to treat her patients. Women might have featured prominently among a traditional healer's patients. Women's belief in magic warranted surreptitious visits to the traditional healer (more so if she was a woman) in times of personal calamities and apprehension as well as preservation of the health and fertility of the household members, land and animals (Ritner 2001:229-330). Magic infused all aspect of people's daily lives and for this reason the traditional healer and her magical powers were also consulted regarding affairs that were non-medical.

<sup>292</sup> Naturopathy that includes herbalism was also attributed to the 'traditional healer' in ancient Near Eastern society. Brenner-Idan (2014:70) notes that naturopathy is 'absent from the list... of magical activities' written down in the Old Testament. Plants in their entirety including 'branches, roots, seeds, bark, sap...' were completely utilised (Teall 2014:3). In addition, the traditional healer may also have used animal parts and mineral substances such as salt [sodium chloride] and saltpeter [potassium nitrate] (Teall 2014:3). Possessing an extensive pharmaceutical knowledge, the traditional healer 'prescribed, prepared, weighed and compounded a large variety of *materia medica*' (Stieglitz 1981:54). Stieglitz (1981:52-55) presents an alternative interpretation of the Ugaritic text UT 2050. According to Stieglitz, the text – an inventory list of 17 items – thought to be a record of a woman's cosmetic equipment, is instead a catalogue of a physician's various medical tools.

<sup>293</sup> The box was found in a 12<sup>th</sup> dynasty Egyptian burial shaft known as the magician's tomb, underneath the north storerooms of the Ramesseum by Flinders Petrie and James Quibell between 1885 and 1886. It is known as the 'magicians' box'. The box contained 23 texts written on papyri, known as the Ramesseum texts, which were mainly magic medical texts but also included some hymns and rituals in addition to a bundle of reed pens. These writing tools are indicative of the box's use by a literate person, probably a priest or magician. Apotropaic wands, ivory clappers, female fertility figurines, beads, amulets and model food offerings were also found in the tomb and may or may not be connected to the 'magicians' box' (Ritner 2001:323-324; cf Price 2016).

place (given the religious ideology) in (pre-monarchic) Israelite society (Allan 2001:377-394). A possible reason might be that the ancient Israelite worldview credited YHWH mainly to qualify for honoured position of physician and healer (cf Gn 17:18-19; 21:1-7; Ex 15:16; 23:25; Muntner 2007:720). In Judges 13:2-24, for example, it was YHWH who healed the mother of Samson of her barrenness. Therefore, I believe that traditional healing which depended on the use of incantations and spells to bring about cures would have been strictly forbidden since they would have contravened the covenantal laws of YHWH. Muntner (2007:720) points out that '[male]priests were the custodians of public health' and the physician 'the instrument through whom God could affect the cure' (insertion mine). In my opinion, both priest and physician therefore would have held an important place in the pre-monarchic Israelite community. Because of isolation of the communities in the Hill Country, traditional healers might have occupied the roles left by absent priests and physicians.

Given the Israelite propensity for foreign religions and their practices, the position of healer might have been important with associated authority. It is also a possibility that women physicians and traditional healers functioned in a complementary type of work relationship like the ancient Mesopotamian physician and practitioner of religious medicine (Teall 2014:3; cf Ritner 2001:324).<sup>294</sup>

### c. The power of the traditional healer

The power of the witch or traditional healer involved doing miracles and clairvoyance to change the sequence of upcoming events (Brenner-Idan 2014:68-70).

Brenner-Idan (2014:72) sees in the behaviour of Zipporah, the wife of Moses, in Exodus 4:25-26 the actions of a (male) witch (non-worshipper of YHWH) doctor or 'holy man' (follower of YHWH). The narrative in Exodus describes Moses's near death at the hands of YHWH (probably because Moses's son was uncircumcised [cf Exodus 4.26]). Zipporah, however, saved his life by cutting off the son's foreskin with a flint knife and touching Moses's feet with it (Ex 4:25).

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<sup>294</sup> Teall (2014:3) reports that the ancient Mesopotamian physician and his 'religious counterpart' were that common as to require the regulation of their services and fees by law found in the code of Hammurabi (cf Spiegel & Springer 1997:70; Inskeep 1969:26).



In my opinion, however, it is more likely that Zipporah (having learned of the covenant probably from her husband Moses as well as the circumcision law) was re-affirming or reminding YHWH of the covenant He had made with Abraham in Genesis 12:103; 15:18-21 that is sealed by the (blood) sign of circumcision. Her words *hatan damim*, which can mean either Moses was a ‘bridegroom of blood’ to her or that God was a father-in-law of blood to her (Frymer-Kensky 2009a), may refer to this covenant.<sup>295</sup> As such, her role was greater than that of a mere ‘witch doctor’ or ‘holy man’; she was representing the Hebrew nation and in her sacrifice secured a future for them in which events played out as they should in accordance with God’s divine plan for all mankind.

The considerable powers of witches and people’s faith in their magic to affect both positively (blessings, for example) and negatively (curses) upon their lives and those of others might account for the Biblical ban on the witch or traditional healer (Lv 19:26, 20:26-27; Dt 18:10-13). Magic healing may have been part of the abilities of the ‘witch’ of Endor in 1 Samuel 28. A traditional healer’s powers made her a personage that might have been both feared and revered at the same time. In Samuel 28, the diviner of Endor<sup>296</sup> was obviously a woman of considerable influence.<sup>297</sup> Perhaps because of reasons regarding safety – women were, after all, the givers of life and responsible for the continuation of the family lineage – the dangers involved in practising magic made it a taboo custom. Still, I believe that the powers of the traditional healer, would have promoted them to substantial status in pre-monarchic Israelite society.

#### 4.6.4.5 *Sacred magic and magic accessories*

In light of Exodus 22:18; Leviticus 19:31; 20:6; Deuteronomy 18:10 and the condemnation of sorcery and witchcraft by the prophets, women were supposed to consult priests and prophets of YHWH and invoke His protection over themselves, their children and other

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<sup>295</sup> This prophecy is generally understood by Christians to refer to the future Messiah.

<sup>296</sup> I prefer the term ‘diviner’ to ‘witch’ to refer to the woman at Endor in 1 Samuel 28. As I point out in the text, the Bible writer in contrast to Saul treated her sympathetically. She showed fear when confronted with the truth and enough compassion to attempt to comfort Saul. For these reasons, I avoid the term witch that for all its negativity obscures ‘seeing’ the person behind the designation.

<sup>297</sup> Though her ‘art’ was forbidden in Israelite society, she was not portrayed as a contemptible character by the narrative. Perhaps the Bible writer, even though magic and sorcery were forbidden practices, was appreciative of her honest representation of her powers for she did not attempt to trick or deceive the king (BibleGateway 2016. Witch of Endor. From: <https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/all-women-bible/Witch-Endor>).

family members in their households. However, the archaeological record shows that they also added to their worship of YHWH the magical rites of deities associated with Egypt (Bes) and the Canaanites (4.4.4.12; 4.6.1.1; 4.6.3.5). Trachtenberg remarks that ‘according to ancient sources women were inordinately prone to the pursuit of the magical arts’ and from this we might infer that ancient magicians in the pre-monarchic period largely consisted of women <sup>298</sup> (Trachtenberg 1939:16).

Since ancient women did not distinguish between magic and religion (Jeffers 2007:631),<sup>299</sup> the tasks of lighting lamps and burning of incense took on a dual purpose. These seemingly ordinary tasks not only illuminated dark corners and eliminated bad odours but also dispelled the presence of evil spirits. The magical accessories of women found at Lachish, Tel Masos, Tell el-Far’ah (Willet 2001), possibly Ai (inter alia beads, a lamp), Megiddo, Tell Batash (though the cultic use of the beads and pendants found here remain unsure), Beersheba (including ‘a double crown amulet and two faience articles’), and Beth Shean (‘faience objects’, collectibles and ‘scarabs’; Albertz & Schmitt 2012:75-84, 87-91) all point to the magical beliefs of women. At Lachish, in spaces occupied by women, were found a single piece of magic jewellery, cowrie shell eye amulets, a consecrated bone eye scarabaeid, and ‘a blue faience bead’ as apotropaic mechanisms to ward off evil. Discovered at Lachish (house 1032) were five beads together with a solitary gold, a faience Nefertum amulet, a carnelian spacer and a shell shard. In house 1031 a couple of eye amulets: in one ‘a blue faience imitation cowrie shell’ and in the other ‘a bone pendant with ring – and dots designs’ were found (Willet 2001; cf Albertz & Schmitt 2012:116-125).

A married woman desiring to conceive could pray to YHWH and make a vow (Gn 25:21; 1 Sm 1:9-18; Pr 31:2; Marsman 2003:224). She could also present food, drink and incense offerings and other gifts to Asherah in the hope that such presentations would lead the goddess to approve her petition. Goddess figurines and stands for burning incense and oil as well as vessels for libations and food offerings, gifts of food and luxury pottery were habitually placed on benches. Dwellings at Tell el-Far’ah, Tell Masos, Tel Halif and

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<sup>298</sup> Trachtenberg, however, ascribes a masculine part to the role of a magician.

<sup>299</sup> Jeffers (2007:632-634) discusses the ancient Israelite mindset regarding magic and divination that were very real to them.

Beersheba show instances of artefacts and furniture used in domestic rites (Willett 2002:35; Marsman 2003:224). According to the dominant cultural ideology, infertility was a sign of dishonour and God's disfavour and naturally led desperate women to religio-magic rituals and articles (Marsman 2003:224-225).

#### 4.6.4.6 *A household religion for women*

Altogether these magic objects reveal that women were anxious about safeguarding themselves and their children from baby-pinching demonic spirits and the evil eye<sup>300</sup> (Willett 2001). Because 'magic is concerned with' inter alia 'fertility' and reproduction (Jefferson 2007:635) and because women had more knowledge about the personal details of these concerns (Nakhai 2011:356), it is clear that a women's household religious system included: 1) prayers and offerings (possibly to YHWH and the fertility goddess to conceive or to cure infertility, for example); 2) the use of special magic objects and rites (amulets, herbs and divination, for instance); and 3) magical healing and medical assistance (required in cases of childbirth complications)<sup>301</sup> evolved and were combined to address women's concerns. Their religion was primarily a synthesis of the YHWH cult and probably the fertility goddess Asherah. But there were other foreign cultic influences as well. Amulets of Bes and figurines of the Hathors reflect Egyptian religious inspirations.

I believe that centred on their lifecycles, women could participate in a religion that supplied all their cultic needs – including women's specific issues. Within this type of domestic cult in accordance with the heterarchical structure of the household,<sup>302</sup> all tasks were considered valuable and equal. Since the people developed a need for divination (contrary to YHWH's covenantal laws), it is possible that women were allowed to become

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<sup>300</sup> The proto-Israelites seem to have inherited their belief in the evil eye from the ancient Near East. The evil eye in antiquity was imagined to be an innate ability of a man or a woman to injuriously affect others with a look and in so doing bring about death, infertility and sickness (Kotze 2008:207-208; see Trachtenberg 1939:54-56). A menacing threat for women during childbirth was the fearful female demon Lamashtu who snatched unweaned babies. Invocations against her can be found in ancient Near Eastern texts. An 8<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> century BC inscription discovered in Arslan Tash in northern Syria records flying female demons who smother children (Trachtenberg 1939:36-37; Riley 1999:236; Willett 2002:29-30; Scholem 2007:17).

<sup>301</sup> Nakhai (2011:356-357), who cites Meyers (1988:112-113), comments that women were frequently more in need of medico-magical help than men because women 'suffered from childbirth-related health risks' and were more likely to die before men. Women also shouldered the burden of the great amount of infant 'morbidity and mortality' (see also Willett 2002:27-28).

<sup>302</sup> This refers to the corresponding jobs men and women specialised in within a family and the larger society, and that brought them authority and high standing in the community (Nakhai 2011:358; cf Gottwald 2001:301; Meyers 2006:249-251).

specialists in areas such as inter alia divination, midwifery and healing.<sup>303</sup> As a result, these tasks would have been considered important enough to grant women status and authority in the community.

Women could act as midwives (Nemet-Nejat 1998:78) and their services would have been much in demand. Mounce (2016b) observes that the midwife who delivered Tamar's baby [or babies] was extremely competent since the baby [or one of the babies] was in a transverse position (Gn 38:28-29). The mother of Samson would have needed just such a competent and expert midwife, particularly if she was an elderly woman.

As specialists, midwives, for example, had the skill and the knowledge of child-birthing methods. They possessed the necessary knowledge of herbal medicines to assist women in parturition and postnatal care. The midwife was also skilled in the incantation of benedictions and supplications and the use of apotropaic items such as magic charms to summon Divine assistance with the safe delivery of babies (Nakhai 2011:358 who cites Scurlock 1999; Willett 2008; cf Fletcher 2006c). She may have used an incantation like the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC Hebrew incantation that invokes the assistance of the mother goddess Asherah for a woman giving birth (cf Witcombe 2000).

#### *4.6.4.7 Sacred magic for infertility, conception and pregnancy*

Without a doubt, the sorceress who could use her magic in potions and herbal medicines and her invocations to reverse infertility would have been favoured by women. In ancient Israel, mandrakes were thought to cure infertility and a barren woman would use these herbs in her efforts to conceive (cf 5.3.4; Ebeling 2010:138; Gn 30:14-16). A Mesopotamian remedy for infertility involved threading 21 stones on a linen string and wearing them around her neck (Nemet-Nejat 1999:91-92). Once pregnant a woman wore amulets such as the ones found at Tel Mason, Tell el-Far'ah and Lachish to prevent

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<sup>303</sup> Meyers (2006:247-249) comments that women organised themselves in guilds in which they studied, trained and became skilled. These women gathered their 'knowledge of techniques, substances, rituals, equipment and even utterances necessary for performing certain essential functions in Israelite society' from generations of women before them and they, in turn, would transfer their skills to the generations after them (Meyers 2006:247-249).

miscarriage<sup>304</sup> (Marsman 2003:199; Willett 2001). The Mesopotamian texts also describe a prenatal care ‘plan’ for expecting mothers that entailed (magic) herbal liquids, talismans, ritual ceremonies and incantations (Nemet-Nejat 1999:92).

#### 4.6.4.8 *Rituals and childbirth*

Analogous writings show that Israelite women probably gave birth sitting on a stool or in a crouched position atop an opening scooped into the ground (cf Figure 4.24). Midwives or possibly female family relatives held the woman at her back and below her arms (cf Figure 4.25; De Vaux 1997:42-43; Fletcher 2006c; cf Marsman 2003:200, 231; Ex 1:16). Perhaps incense was burned or other oils and/or lamps were lit and female figurines such as the ones found in the Hathor sanctuary at Timna placed in the confinement room (Willett 2001). This room was either one of the rooms at the back of the house or an outside room fixed to the house or possibly even on the roof (Marsman 2003:200). ‘Hathor figurines’ were discovered at Lachish in room 307 in house 314. Seven Hathors represented the natal goddesses of ancient Egypt and so their assistance may have been invoked in the birthing process.



Figure 4.24 Birthing chair (<http://www.womeninthebible.net/bible-extras/childbirth>)

<sup>304</sup> An amulet-tequma referred to in the Talmud for protecting pregnant women against malevolent spirits is described as a ‘preserving stone’ (Bloom 2007:138).



Figure 4.25 Phoenician midwives – assisting woman in childbirth. Phoenician 8-6<sup>th</sup> century BC  
(<http://www.womeninthebible.net/bible-extras/childbirth>)

The midwives skilled in the art would have chanted incantations (‘magico-religious texts’) to deter evil spirits (Marsman 2003:199). Invocations was particularly made against Lamashtu who was believed to creep into a pregnant woman’s home and kill her unborn child by means of seven taps on her belly. In Mesopotamia, a woman in child labour was given tree bark for mastication. Her stomach was rubbed with an unguent and/or a magic wooden pin was rolled over her stomach to relieve her of pain and discomfort (Nemet-Nejat 1999:92). In ancient Israel, a newborn baby was (ritually) bathed before being swaddled in strips of linen (Gruber 2000:156; Fletcher 2006c). Thereafter, the mother (and sometimes the father) would name the child (Gn 29:31; 30:24; 35:18; 1Sm1:20; De Vaux 1997:43).

After giving birth, a mother was considered ritually impure for several days (Marsman 2003:231-234; cf Bloom 2007:88). Afterwards she was to present an animal as a sacrifice to the priests at the Tabernacle in Shiloh to complete the purification ritual (Lv 12:1-8; cf 3.4.6.3). It was probably also possible for the mother to make an offering to end the purification period at the domestic shrine indicated in Judges 17:6. The ritual is a woman’s specific rite and must have been profoundly sacred and joyous to her. Her male relatives were not allowed to participate in this ritual.

#### 4.6.4.9 *The new mother*

A new mother, particularly if she had birthed a son, reached a new level of authority in her household and society. Her newly acquired status allowed her to officiate over the Passover rituals at home (Marsman 2003:642). How much more significant to her as a mother was the Passover ritual since that great ritual had its roots in a blood rite (the slaughter of a

lamb) to safeguard the life of the firstborn of the Israelite children (Ex 12:1-30).<sup>305</sup> Did the new mother think of YHWH who saved them on the night of the Passover from the Angel of Death in Egypt?<sup>306</sup>

#### 4.7 CONCLUSION

Apparently, women lived a full and varied religious existence in which they often occupied positions of high status and gained great authority. One only needs to consider Deborah as a devoted follower of only YHWH as an example of the autonomy and authority that was available to many women in the pre-monarchic Israelite community. To say that women were entirely oppressed and second-class participants in the various cultic behaviour they undertook is misguided. Apparently, in Shiloh and on the high places, women performed a range of cultic duties that afforded them status and authority in their community. Though not evident in the Book of Judges, evidence for women's worth and value in Yahwistic cult at the Tabernacle in Shiloh as well as the syncretic cult practised on the high places and in the households of the proto-Israelites have been presented above. The cultic tasks performed by women, such as baking and weaving, mirrored the duties they did in their households. The transference of their household tasks into their religious lives would probably have been accompanied by the same type of authority women acquired in their households through their control and management of the domestic processes. Since women were indispensable to their household's survival, it is understandable that their cultic tasks would have made women essential to the Israelite religion. Deborah, in her extraordinary roles as prophet and judge of the Israelite tribes and associated status, could be representative of women's roles and status within the social and cultic dimensions of the pre-monarchic household.

In the syncretic cult women could achieve a great deal of authority and standing in their community that involved a good deal of vitality, expertise, training and artistic abilities. For reasons that may have been lost due to the cultural divide that exists between the present and the past, women were excluded from the Israelite priesthood. They had,

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<sup>305</sup> According to an Elephantine letter, a woman was permitted to oversee the Passover celebrations in her husband's absence (Marsman 2003:642).

<sup>306</sup> Deborah, Jael, the mother of Samson and all the other Israelite women, extraordinary and ordinary, had a role to play in the history of Israel which led to another Passover millions of Messianic Jews and Christians would come to celebrate at a different time in the future.

however, other important cultic roles and tasks to fulfill at the Tabernacle in Shiloh. These roles imply that women were as worthy and as holy as men within YHWH's covenantal rule. Women along with men participated in the same cultic activities and tasks and were given the same opportunities for advancement in the religion[s] that they practised.

Israelite women were alongside their Canaanite counterparts empowered by their syncretic religion and emboldened by the outward display of rituals that centred on their various competencies. These sacred female capabilities that *inter alia* included and centred around their reproductive roles in society helped the women who actively participated in the cult to acquire and maintain the autonomy, status and power they held in the Book of Judges. Apparently, these women possessed the same (cultic) rights and activities as men (cf Jdg 9:27; 17:1-5; 21:21) to own the religion and to transform the cult into a women's religion in their households. The women could also elevate their status and authority within the cult through the occupation of the offices of priesthood in the high places and (possibly) sanctuaries of Baal and Asherah. These opportunities were closed to women in the official Israelite religion of YHWH.

Initiation into the rituals and magical rites of the cult consisted of knowledge, concerning cultic women's practices, that was transferred from one generation of women to the next. Thus, women's positions within the Canaanite cult(s) would have been continual since only they could possess this secret cultic knowledge (which ultimately led to their downfall). The women's religion that developed in the Israelite households was probably extended into the wider community.

A woman adept in the cult and experienced in the magic practices and rituals would have been popular and accepted and probably inspired admiration or alternatively fear in the community. In the same way they cared for their families, women baked (and weaved) fed and clothed their fertility deities at home and in the shrines of the high places. It can be imagined that the positions of priestesses would have been much in demand by women ambitious enough in their communities and households for status and power.

As the role models for moral conduct and proper behaviour that their involvement in the Canaanite cult and adherence to YHWH incurred, women were the glue that held the fabric of Israelite society together in the lawless and turbulent times described in the Book of Judges. Women's involvement in ritual celebrations extended to dancing, singing,



music-making and participation in ritual intercourse. As experienced singers, musicians and dancers, women would have become 'household names' and gathered concomitant status, wealth and authority.

Israelite women as priests and diviners were most probably able to serve at the Baal sanctuaries on the high places as these were taken over by the Israelites intact. Though there presently does not exist evidence for women as priestesses, I have speculated that as priestesses, women could perform numerous cultic duties as well as perhaps engage in the sacred marriage ritual. Women affiliated with the Canaanite cult as sacred prostitutes are evident from certain texts in the Old Testament. Nowadays, however, the idea that women functioned as ritual prostitutes in the ancient Near East is disputed. It can be assumed that every sacred role, office and activity within the Canaanite fertility cults undertaken by Israelite women was purposeful and intended to promote their fertility, reproductive capacities, status and authority in the Israelite society in the Book of Judges. The characters of Jael (Kenite) and the mother of Micah as well as Deborah represent examples of women in Iron Age I that obviously filled a cultic role of some sorts. These women are models of the ordinary women in the pre-monarchic period who possessed substance and status.

In their homes women could fulfill all the religious positions that they were excluded from in the official religion as well as acquire authority. The matriarch of the family could gain much authority as leader of a women's religion. There were not any prohibitions against her being a priestess and diviner in her household. Being able to perform sacred rituals within a women's specific religion must have been very empowering to women.

The alleged lower profile of women in the religion was most likely not an intentional act on behalf of the Bible writers because their focus remained on the rightful worship of God. Women in the pre-monarchic period of Israel probably understood that men and women in their society had equal but distinct and separate roles. As her husband's co-worker, the woman's 'work as wife and mother is essential and complementary to his own ... She is his opposite and equal'. Hence, women were held in high esteem and were empowered to carry out their communal tasks. They 'shared many of the same rights and duties as men' in the cultic assembly (Bird 1999:17). It was in their homes that women could acquire influence and authority in the domestic cult. Because of the dominant cultural

ideology, women's specific interests centred on their reproductive life. This led women to religious practices that generated a system of safety and security in the otherwise chaotic pre-monarchic period. However, in the official religion women's religious roles extended beyond their biological lifecycles. Women's cultic roles and status during the time of the Judges were of a diverse and full nature that encompassed their homes and the larger society.

These positions were vital because the formation of an Israelite state required not only a viable and productive economy but also the expression of the belief and worship of supernatural power(s) in conduct and ritual (Harrod 2011:335). Women played integral and stabilising roles in both these dynamics. These were not timid women; neither were they disempowered. Within the covenant relationship with YHWH (theocracy) they had value, they had status. How else could the tribal community continue to function given the male propensity for violence and warfare in the time of the Judges?

## CHAPTER FIVE

### HOUSEHOLDS AS CENTRES OF FEMALE POWER

#### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

A key concept related to female authority is the nature of women's economic activities during the period of the Judges.<sup>307</sup> The authority held by women in this era through their productive and reproductive tasks is a significant facet in this chapter.

This chapter will explore the significant role of the *bêt ēm* and four-room house in the economic and daily reality of the Israelite women in the pre-monarchic period (see 4.6.2.1-4.6.2.6 for the religious context of the four-room house) for it is in these areas that the women first experienced their (economic) independence and the authority of the mothers were passed on to the daughters. The type of defences the Israelites had against their enemies and the possibilities of how women coped with this type of situation will be looked at. Apparently, women could do household chores such as grinding 'just about anywhere' (Ebeling 2010:50; cf Jdg 9:53). It is therefore probable that women continued with these domestic tasks in their hideouts, providing stability and a near normal routine to their family members.

A second point of deliberation is the economic importance of women's labour. The worth of women's economic labour and how they functioned within the family household economy as wives, mothers and workers will be discussed. Women's economic roles and activities must be viewed in terms of food production and preparation, weaving and cloth making, as well as biological reproduction. Attendant to women's reproductive roles are child raising and the education of the next generation of

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<sup>307</sup> That women had considerable influence is clear from the Wisdom literature of Proverbs 31:10-31. That the Hebrew matriarchs had significant authority is also evident in the book of Genesis, for example, Sarah insisting on Abraham taking Hagar as a concubine, Rebecca's deception of Jacob in which she involved Isaac. During the period of the Judges, we find that women such as Achsah (Jdg 1:14-15), Deborah (Jdg 4; 5), the daughter of Jephthah (Jdg 11:26), the mother of Samson (Jdg 13; 14:2-3), the mother of Micah (Jdg 17), and the Levite's concubine (Jdg 19:2) possessed authority and decision-making power. However, while the Bible, in the case of the mothers of Samson and Micah, does not specifically indicate the origins of their authority, the study of the domestic and economic patterns of early Israelite villages may lead researchers to conclude that they may have gained their status from women's cultic and economic behaviour in households (Meyers 1999a:37).

productive workers. In view of the above, the determination of women's status and roles, therefore, will be attempted through their productive and reproductive lives and is the most important aim in this chapter.

### 5.1.1 The *bêt ēm* (the house of the mother)

The social organisation of the proto-Israelite people (2.2.2) allowed for the functioning of the mother's household (*bêt ēm*) alongside that of the father's household (*bêt āb*) (Dallaire 2015:239; cf Meyers 1988:180; Sakenfeld 1999:23; Donaldson 1999:142). The *bêt ēm* was not a separate entity from the father's household. Instead, both the *bêt ēm* and the *bêt āb* worked together as interdependent entities that shared tasks and authority and were therefore equal in status (Meyers 1997a:26) in a heterarchical social system (see 2.2.2.1; 3.1.3.2c; 4.3.4.1; 4.3.4.2; 5.3.2; 6.3.3.1b; Footnote 348; Gottwald 2001:171, 301; Meyers 2006:249-250). Benjamin (2015:55) observes that heterarchy in early Israel 'did not endow elite males at the top of the pyramid with authority in every area of the household...' while entirely marginalising women 'at the bottom of the pyramid'. He furthermore states that women performed farm tasks, processed food from raw materials, and manufactured the households clothing, baskets and pottery while mediating conflicts (Jdg 4; 5; 13; 14), and they educated and trained their children and one another in the skills and abilities needed for their economic and physical survival as a people (Benjamin 2015:55-56).

Heterarchy endows some women with authority – even over elite males – in certain areas of household life. The authority of women could vary. The authority of women in food production was high, but in public worship was low.<sup>308</sup> Men and women [in the pre-monarchic period] were neither separate and equal, nor separate and subordinate. In Deuteronomy [and the pre-monarchic period] men and women exercise different kinds of authority in different social settings (cf Jdg 1:11-15; 4-5; 13; 14:1-5; 17:1-4) ([insertions mine] Benjamin 2015:55).

An obvious example of the interdependency and cooperation between the *bêt ēm* and the *bêt āb* is to be found in the sharing of parental authority in Judges 14:2-4.<sup>309</sup>

<sup>308</sup> However, I believe that the contrary was true. As indicated in Chapter Four of this study, women had a full and varied religious life that could grant them the same authority as men (cf Jdg 4; 5).

<sup>309</sup> The autonomy and authority of Samson's mother, evident in Judges 14:2-4, is emphasised in Judges 14:5. Samson's parents were responsible for the proposal of marriage and therefore they had to go with him to Timnah (Whedon 1909c; Pett 2013a). The mother probably decided to go with her husband and son on a risky journey as they were about to enter territory belonging to the hostile Philistines (cf Jdg 14:5; Coffman 1999d). Samson's initial request to 'get her for him' was put to his father (Jdg 14:2) and not to his mother. The reason for this was that his mother probably presented the most opposition to the proposed match (Gill 2012b) since she knew YHWH's opposition to marrying foreign women.

In Judges 14:2, Samson, contrary the prevalent culture ideology, asked both his parents to negotiate and arrange his marriage with a woman from Timnah.<sup>310</sup> The household as the centre of economic power was also the centre of female power, and the duties performed and the authority therein were on par with male duties and authority in the outside community (Meyers 1999b:110-127).<sup>311</sup> Women and men could not function economically independently of support. Achsah needed her husband Othniel (Jdg 1:12) and possibly sons (and daughters) or hired hands to work the land given to by her father Caleb in Judges 1:15. As mentioned before in Chapter Two, the land made severe labour demands on its inhabitants. Cyclical harvest patterns required a large workforce to sow and reap within a short span of time. Maintaining the terraces, clearing the land and the laborious daily routine of caring for the cattle, obtaining water and the conversion of crops into items of food meant that both men and women were needed to complete these tasks (Meyers 1997a:18). In the *bēt ēm* of Achsah and the *bēt āb* of Othniel, an equalised authority was very necessary to produce an extremely skilled, efficient and well-coordinated organisational system in which women contributed significantly to the economy of the pre-monarchic period.

## 5.2 HOUSES AND STRONG TOWERS

### 5.2.1 Introduction

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<sup>310</sup> Samson saw a Philistine woman and desired to marry her for she was pleasing to his eyes (Jdg 14:1). Gill (2012b) comments that Samson, aware of fierce objection from his parents, was open and honest about the background of the Philistine woman. Judges 14:5 relates the mother and father of Samson accompanying him to Timnah to handle the marriage negotiations (Whedon 1909c; Pett 2013a). The parents strongly wished to protect their son from possibly losing his life in marrying a Philistine woman. Though they protested the marriage, the obstinacy of Samson overrode their objections (Jdg 14:3; Coffman 1999d). The parents' principal complaint was that Samson's potential bride was a Philistine. Deuteronomy prohibited intermarriage with the Canaanites (see e.g. Jdg 2; 3). The reasons relevant to this injunction were also applicable to Philistines (Bullinger 1922b; Coffman 1999d).

<sup>311</sup> Fuchs (2005:217) remarks that Frymer-Kensky assigns a diminished status to women's position in society in accordance with the reduction in the influence of the goddess at the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC in the ancient Near East. Consequently, while women may have had good standing in previous eras associated with goddess worship, it steadily eroded when this type of cult fell out of favour with the people. But even the high status that came with goddess worship may have been only available to upper-class women, which left many of the 'ordinary women' way out of the loop, according to Fontaine (Frymer-Kensky 1992:1-6, 70-80; Fontaine 1999:159; Fuchs 2005:217). However, through the mutual dependency of men and women on each other, women could gain much authority. Women under such a patriarchal system would have shared an equal power with their husbands in their households. In addition, the leadership roles of women in the domestic cult (Meyers 1988:163; Ackerman 1999:21-31; Fuchs 2005:216-217) may have served as models for significant female authority in the Israelite society overall.

That a close relationship existed between the four-room house and the daily lives of Israelite men and women is made clear by the material cultural of Iron I society in ancient Israel (Bunimovitz & Faust 2003:411-412). Even as the religious architecture of the Israelite society defined where men and women worshipped, so too did the domestic architecture determine where men and women worked and which tasks they performed.

The functionality of the Tabernacle (a symbol of Israelite egalitarian ideology) was such that it represented a unique societal conception in the ancient Near East (Meyers 1988:9). Within the Israelite religion, both the ordinary man and the ordinary woman were equal participants in the official cult at Shiloh. YHWH intended men and women to be equal during His theocratic rule, but this equality was disturbed by the dominant cultural ideology and the whole male body versus the unwhole body worldview, for example, as well as the wickedness of the people. Based on a (sacred) ideology, they were also considered to be equal partners within the economic and social arrangements of the pre-monarchic household. Consequently, the gender division of labour inherent in both the religious and social fabric of Israelite daily life did not necessarily mean the subjugation of women. Bird (1999:9) comments that although women's leadership roles were limited in the official religion, 'they were not absolutely excluded from cultic service or sacred space'.<sup>312</sup>

However, women were at liberty to establish their own religion in their households (cf 4.6) in which they were free to occupy ritual leadership roles (Bird 1999:6). It was within the household cult that women could formulate rituals based on their lifecycles and their 'spiritual and emotional needs' (Bird 1999:6, 12-13). The autonomy that emerged from a women's specific religion as well as control and management of domestic process were probably extended into all aspects of women's lives. In the narratives of the Book of Judges, no mention is made of veiled women accompanied by male family members or acquiring their permission to go about. Also, women, unaccompanied by their husbands, were present in the company of unrelated men (cf Jdg 4:6, 18; Gn 24:11-17). We cannot imagine a veiled Deborah encouraging Barak to go to war or the mother of Samson working

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<sup>312</sup> Bird (1999:11) remarks that there were not any restrictions on women assuming the office of prophets, but this does not mean women were '...free to exercise it' as their domestic responsibilities would have been their primary priority.

in the field, her face veiled, or Achsah and the wife in Proverbs 31 being granted special permission go outside their houses and do business, veiled and unrecognisable to the traders. Such behaviour would have been, in the words of Meyers (1988:172), ‘anti-thetical to the dynamics and demands for a premodern agricultural society’.

## **5.2.2 The four-room house**

### *5.2.2.1 Defining women’s space*

Dutcher-Walls (2009:2) defines a household as:

a person or a group of people who live together in one or more structures, who carry out daily activities necessary for the maintenance and social reproduction of the group within a specific space associated with the residence, and who interact with other households (see also Harding 2011:14).

The four-room house (see 4.6.2.1) of the pre-monarchic Israelites was their residence of choice (Ebeling 2010:31-32; cf 4.6.2). The dwelling functioned throughout the course of the Iron Age as a ‘socio-economic unit’ the walls of which in general enclosed agrarian families. Just as ‘terracing was a successful adaption to the highlands’, so too the four-room building emerged ‘as a successful adaptation to farm life’ (Stager 1985:17; cf Finkelstein 1996:201; Noll 2013:173). Four-room houses were found at various sites including Tel Beersheba, Tell Beit Mirsim, Tell en-Nasbeh, Tell el-Far’ah, Tell es-Sa’idiyeh and Tel Hazor (Faust & Bunimovitz 2003:25; cf Netzer 1992:193-201; Singer-Avitz 2011:279-282).

The house consisted of two floors (see Figure 4.21). The ground floor was used for activities related to food processing and ‘small craft production, stabling and storage’ (see Figure 5.1). The second floor functioned as sleeping quarters and was used for eating and ‘other activities’ (Stager 1985:17; cf Shiloh 1970:180-190; Holladay 2009:63-71; Ebeling 2010:31). As a self-sufficient unit, the four-room house was the centre of social and economic power that also served as a basis for concomitant female power and influence in households (cf 4.6.2; Meyers 1988:145, 187; Ebeling 2010:32).



Figure 5.1 Inside the four-room house (<http://ancientart.tumblr.com/post/55887623235/a-full-scale-replica-of-an-ancient-israelite-home>)

‘Clear evidence exists for domestic activities’ in the archaeological record of ancient Israel (Routledge 2009:48). Subsequently, women’s economic behaviours within the rooms of the four-room house become evident from such evidence.<sup>313</sup> At Tell Halif, for example, the central space in the ground floor went through two stages: ‘as the male working area, at first as an olive press’ and then largely as a ‘women’s activity’ area, ‘but with some male activities as well’ (Holladay 2009:71). The activities at the house in Tell Halif may also be indicative of the ‘gender mutuality and interdependence’ and associated female power mentioned by Meyers (1988:187).

### 5.2.3 Cosmology, religion and economics

#### 5.2.3.1 *‘Looking’ to the east*

Like the Tabernacle, a preponderance of the four-room houses<sup>314</sup> was orientated towards the east because it was believed that this was the direction favoured by God (cf 4.6.2.1; Faust 2001:129-155; Faust & Bunimovitz 2003:22-31).<sup>315</sup> A planned and deliberate positioning of structures that eliminates randomness has been discovered in the 21 Iron Age II four-room houses excavated in villages in Jemein, Beit Aryeh, Khirjat Malta,

<sup>313</sup> Cf Singer-Avitz (2011:275-302) where she grants insight into the domestic activities at Tel Beersheba through an analysis of the material finds at the site. Cf also Stager (1985:1-35) and Holladay (2009:61-88) for more information on the four-room house of Iron Age I Israel.

<sup>314</sup> Faust (2001:131) mentions that many of the four-room dwellings ‘belong to sub-groups of this form, mainly to the three-room house (two long rooms and a broad room at the back)’.

<sup>315</sup> Faust (2001:149) does not offer a ‘functional explanation’ for this phenomenon and concludes ‘that the solution should be sought in another realm’ (Faust 2001:139).



Khirjat Jarish and Khirjat ed-Dawwara. Nine buildings were orientated to the north-east, two to the east, with another six facing north and four to the south, while there were none facing west (Faust 2001:133).

Farmhouses, it appears, also favoured an eastward positioning. Collectively, the Iron II farmhouses uncovered in Wadi Zimri, Pisgat Ze'ev A, Khirjat Er-Ras, Givat Homa, Khirjat 'Alona and Khirjat Shilhah reveal an orientation to the east, one to the south-east and one to the north (Faust 2001:131).<sup>316</sup> Of the Iron Age I buildings excavated at Khirjat Radanna, Ai, Tell Masos, Nahal Yatir, 'Izbet Sartah and Giloh, 'more than 50% are oriented eastward'. Similarly, the houses in the Iron Age city of Beersheba show doorways oriented to the east, north and south. In front of the 'cellar house' and house 855 were courtyard places to the east, through which these dwellings were accessed (Faust 2001:134, 139 Table 2).

Based on these findings (Faust 2001:139 Table 2), the economic behaviour of Iron Age Israelite women in the Hill Country occurred within structures (houses and courtyards) that were built facing the east, which as mentioned earlier and in the opinion of Faust (2001:140-141) 'was the direction of God'. One interpretation is that the east was a place where God interceded on behalf of His people, conveying them hope and redemption (Rodriguez 2008). I believe that the favourable impact of the eastward orientation of both their houses and their Tabernacle upon their thought processes and psychology would have been beneficial to the economic performance of the women. Perhaps the abundance of linen garments offered by Samson to the Philistines in Judges 14:12<sup>317</sup> may be suggestive of the industriousness of women weavers in the household under the management and control of his mother.<sup>318</sup> The proto-Israelite women knew that they were working towards order,

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<sup>316</sup> Faust (2001:133-137) discusses the eastward orientation of structures that also includes royal residences and urban houses at different sites in ancient Israel.

<sup>317</sup> In Judges 14:19, Samson kills 30 Philistine men in Ashkelon. He takes their linen garments and gave it to the men who solved his riddle in Judges 14:12. However, evidence of weaving activities has been discovered in the area of Zorah where Samson was born. An industrial sized weaving industry uncovered at Beth Shemesh, in the area of Zorah, the birth town of Samson, probably developed from early household weaving activities (see 5.8.1; Bromiley et al [eds] 1979:730).

<sup>318</sup> Bird (1999:3-20) comments that sacred structures and behaviour cannot be separated from the (economic and social) activities of the Israelite family (on their farms and in their households). The knowledge that the pre-monarchic women had of their various roles within the family as being performed in the direction towards God would have had a powerful effect on their psyche and daily reality as far as the economy, reproduction, raising children, for example, were concerned. Their religious awareness and responsibilities, which solidified their connection to the collective place of worship, would have been transferred to their household

birth, life and overall piety of the family (cf Jdg 13:3-5, 7, 13) as symbolised by the eastward orientation of their work areas, i.e. the courtyards, rooftops and inner rooms of their residences (Faust 2001:144).

#### *5.2.3.2 The four-room house as a symbol of egalitarianism*

Both the Tabernacle and the four-room house were emblems of the egalitarian values of the pre-monarchic Israelites (see 2.2.2). Together with the Tabernacle, the four-room house was a symbol of the unique set of ‘humanitarian and egalitarian principles’<sup>319</sup> that are described by Meyers (1988:9) as ‘not found anywhere else in the ancient world’. Bunimovitz and Faust (2003: 416-417) also describe the four-room house as representative of the egalitarianism of the pre-monarchic Israelites (Dever 2003:110; Ebeling 2010:31; Faust 2014:79-80; cf Nakhai 2011:338; 2015:93; Fleming 2012:249; Grabbe 2017:6).

Similar to the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle, the four-room house probably functioned as a separation between pure and impure.<sup>320</sup> However, these arrangements should not be seen as implements of women’s subjugation (Meyers 1988:36) since I believe the people were following the laws of conduct which under YHWH’s theocracy were not intended to harm women or men.<sup>321</sup> The floor plan of the house was uniform and all rooms were accessible from the courtyard (Bunimovitz & Faust 2003:416; Faust 2014:79-80). As mentioned in Chapter Four (cf 4.6.2.2), there was most probably a back room where menstruating women could rest while the rest of the house was accessible to all (Bunimovitz & Faust 2003:416; Faust 2014:79-80). This type of floor plan provided a beneficial setting for households to maintain order within their work activities for now men and women could do their chores unperturbed by breaking the religious codes and this in turn had the result of increasing the family’s economic output (Bunimovitz & Faust 2003:416; cf Faust 2014:79-80). By means of this behaviour, one aspect of the moral and ethical behaviour as exemplified by the Tabernacle was transmitted into the four-room

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behaviour. Women’s household tasks in return established a rock-solid connection to the family, their residence and position in the community (Klein 2009).

<sup>319</sup> Women were not allowed in all the rooms of the Tabernacle, but neither were certain (ordinary) men.

<sup>320</sup> This function of the four-room house was also mentioned in Chapter Three (3.2.1).

<sup>321</sup> They should also not be seen as the subjugation of women and men in the case of the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle. The High Priest who presented YHWH was the only one allowed to enter, and that only once a year to make atonement for the people’s and even his sin.

house. In return, within these settings the economic output of women could peak at forty percent of the household's production capabilities (Miller 2005:8).

#### *5.2.3.3 The four-room house of holiness and economics*

As the Tabernacle presented the holiness and honour of God, so too did the four-room houses represent the holiness and honour of women and men since the dwelling facilitated and structured the laws of conduct regarding order and holiness (see 4.6.2; 4.6.2.1; Bunimovitz & Faust 2003:416; cf Faust 2014:79-80). As God gave life and offered His protection and provision, so too did women offer the same to their children and household (Simkins 2003:73; cf Jdg 14:2-3; Pr 31:10-31). The four-room houses were women's spaces in which they ruled the roost and fulfilled their 'domestic roles such as raising and educating children and managing the household economy' (Simkins 2000:69).

These were also the holy spaces that denoted a differentiation between women's and men's tasks, but work that can be perceived as equivalent in their economic output to those of men (Meyers 1998:251-262; 1999a:33-44; 2002b:14-44). Apparently, the Israelite women displayed their industriousness in their holy domestic spaces from the inception of their settlement in Canaan. This can be inferred from the evidence from Israelite squatter occupation of Ai in the Iron I period. According to Stripling (2015), a domestic building roughly constructed in Square Q9 in the ruins of the Late Bronze I fortification wall at Khirjat El-Maqtar reveals Iron I pottery that could indicate evidence of women's activities. In Square R11, a stone-lined pit was carved into a floor corner (Stripling 2015). Pottery sherds from cooking pots, a restorable jug as well as a broken mortar and a damaged limestone roof roller were found inside the pit. In Square Q21, numerous pottery sherds and two poorly constructed walls from Iron Age I indicate a larger settlement during the time of the Judges (Stripling 2015).<sup>322</sup>

#### **5.2.4 Shelters, caves and strongholds in the mountains**

During times of enemy attack and raids on their villages and farms, the four-room houses would not have provided adequate protection (cf Jdg 6:6). The Book of Judges records

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<sup>322</sup> Cf Bryant Wood (2014) for an account of the excavations at Khirjat el-Maqtar in 1995-2000 and 2009-2013.

their enemies would hide in the fields and make attacks on their lives, destroying crops and animals. At times, this destruction would result in severe impoverishment. During these attacks, the women would have to abandon their homes and hide out in strongholds (Jdg 2-6). Despite these violent interruptions and breakdown in their lives, the women managed to bring society back to normal again.

Cundall and Morris (2011:226) observe that it would have been hazardous for the Israelites to live in unprotected or unwallled villages and towns since these areas were vulnerable to marauding troops. Villagers lacked the battlements such as walls, ramparts and fortresses of the city dwellers that would secure them from attackers and marauders. They were also short of enough men to form strong defence armies (Carr & Conway 2010:36). The people were therefore exposed and defenceless against the well-organised raiding armies (cf Jdg 6:1-6) from the lowlands or coastal plains.

The book of Judges recounts the foes of the proto-Israelites as concealing themselves in the fields where they would ambush the farmers, laying waste to their crops. Judges 6:2-6 demonstrates that the farmers and villagers could not effectively protect their crops and homes since they lacked military strength due to insufficient numbers of soldiers (cf Jdg 5:7; 6:5; Carr & Conway 2010:36). The smallest villages for the most contained about 50 people and about 150 in larger ones (Meyers 1997a:12; cf Carr & Conway 2010:36). Judges 6:5 declares the Midianites, Amalekites and the other Canaanite people outnumbered the Israelites and were like locusts swarming the land. The pre-monarchic Israelites also lacked the superior iron technology of their enemies to ward off invasions (cf Jdg 1:19, 4:3; McNutt 1999:75; Wong 2012). Judges 3:2, in addition, reveals that the Israelites did not have warfare experience.<sup>323</sup> The rugged highlands offered the pre-monarchic Israelites with many hideout places – strongholds – where they could remain hidden until the danger of an enemy attack had passed (Jdg 6:2; 1 Sm 23:14; cf Jr 9:2; 1 Ki 19:14).<sup>324</sup>

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<sup>323</sup> Cundall and Morris (2011:225) point out that the Midianites also employed a ‘secret weapon’ during their yearly occupations of Israelite farms, namely the camel. Iron chariots were not effective in the Hill Country (Jordan 1985:13). The camels of the Midianites gave this nation and the other Canaanite peoples the enormous advantage of a swift military potency capable of traveling at great distances (Cundall & Morris 2011:225).

<sup>324</sup> Ryken et al (2000i:3189) comment that the wilderness offered areas of refuge to the Israelites. For example, the Israelites went into the wilderness during their Exodus from Egypt, David fled to a stronghold

The Israelites would have no choice but to hide out in the shelters made in mountain clefts, caves and strongholds they had previously prepared in anticipation of the invasions by the Midianites and other Canaanites (Jdg 6:2).<sup>325</sup> These caves were natural rock formations in the mountain sides, while other caves were artificial and cut out of the soft limestone rock (Jamieson, Fausset & Brown 1888b). Their inaccessibility would have offered the Israelites adequate safety from their enemies invading their villages and farms.

The Edomite rock stronghold of es-Sela in the mountainous region of southern Jordan may offer insight into the type of strongholds inhabited by the Israelites during times of warfare. Well-hidden es-Sela is a natural rock fortress that is bordered by deep canyons and various rock-cut rooms (Corbett 2015). It is also possible that the Israelites fled to fortresses in cities such as Shechem with its fortress temple (cf Jdg 9:50-51; Reich 1992:10) and Megiddo<sup>326</sup> where palaces III-V have been identified to serve as fortresses that date back to the Late Bronze Age. A fortified palace or fortress has also been identified at Tanaach (Oren 1992:109, 116).<sup>327</sup>

Having had to prepare their shelters in advance in anticipation of enemy invasions, it is probable that these places of safety were well stocked with provisions to wait out the attack (Pett 2013h) as well as with the household items and utensils of women's lives such as looms and grindstones. The women would have been able to continue with their weaving and grinding tasks (cf Jdg 9:53). In Judges 9:54, the presence of a mill stone indicates that these strong towers were equipped with the tools of everyday living. It is therefore plausible that during times of prolonged sieges women continued with their daily tasks of grinding grain and preparing meals. The discovery of figurines, faience amulets of Egyptian gods, pottery, jewellery, stone tools, lamps, bottles and other finds in a cave in the Negev of southern Israel that date back to the Late Bronze Age and the Iron Age (Perlson 2015)

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in the wilderness (1 Sm 23-14, 26:2-6) and so too did Jeremiah (Jr 9:2) and Elijah (1Ki 19:4); cf Ryken et al (2000j:2764-2766).

<sup>325</sup> Gill's (2012a) observes that the caves were for the poorer Israelites and strongholds for the wealthier people (cf Barnes 1870c; Whedon 1909b; Ellicott 2016b). Jamieson, Fausset and Brown (1888b) comment that the caves were huge and could accommodate up to 4000 people.

<sup>326</sup> According to new archaeological evidence, Megiddo's changeover from a Canaanite to an Israelite city is not obvious (Silberman et al [sa]). It is possible that people desperate to escape their enemies might have taken refuge in it, whether Canaanite or Israelite.

<sup>327</sup> It is probable that the six cities of refuge for perpetrators of crime, namely Golan, Ramoth and Bosor to the east of the Jordan River and Kedesh, Shechem and Hebron to the west of the Jordan River (Jos 20:7), could also offer sanctuary to those Israelites fleeing from their attackers.

indicate that people took their prized and everyday life possessions with them into the cave. It cannot be ruled out that the Israelite women, wherever they were hiding, may have attempted to establish a normal daily routine under a trying and abnormal reality that frequently occurred.

#### *5.2.4.1 Watchtowers*

Strongholds such as the tower of Peniel, destroyed by Gideon in Judges 8:17, are mentioned in the Book of Judges. Whedon (1909b) comments that the tower of Peniel might have served as both a watchtower and a fortress since it was a stronghold situated on the route to the far East. The men of Peniel were slaughtered here by Gideon and his troops (Jdg 8:17).

In their orchards, fields or vineyards the farmers and villagers erected small and secluded towers of plain architectural design (Bez 2011). Although these simple structures lacked the strong and more secure walls of the more defensible city watchtowers (cf Unger 1988f; Mazar 1992b:169-172), they were vital to the safety of the farmers and the villagers and in securing an abundant gathering of crops (Bez 2011). During the harvest season, entire households would frequently reside in watchtowers<sup>328</sup> (cf Figure 5.2 and Figure 5.3). They served as observation posts where the family members would take turns keeping watch or viewing the landscape for thieves and wild animals that wanted to steal or destroy their crops or livestock (Sherman 2004:28-29). Presumably the women of the household would take with them their equipment for food preparation, cooking, cleaning and everyday living during occupation of these towers at the time of the harvest season. Watchtowers offered agrarian families a sense of security because they represented God's power, provision and defence of the households.

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<sup>328</sup> Kempinsky (1986) argues that instead of being an altar, possibly that of Joshua (Jos 8:30-35) as proposed by Zertal (1986), the excavated remains on Mt Ebal represent three separate Iron I occupation phases: firstly, pits, secondly, a farmhouse and lastly a watchtower (cf Zevit 2001:196-197).

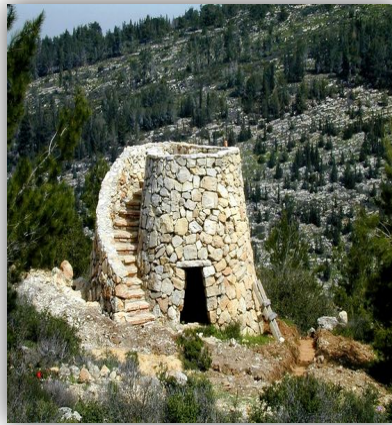


Figure 5.2 Biblical watchtower (<https://za.pinterest.com/pin/80220437083446032/>)



Figure 5.3 Watchtower at the Ibex Garden, Yad Hashmona (Jenkins (2014)

Apart from hiding in caves and shelters in the mountains, the best defence for the villages was to come together as a unified force to ward off attacks (Carr & Conway 2010:37). Multiple tribes joining together in times of singular emergencies could also form temporary armed coalitions (Carr & Conway 2010:37). Judges 4-5 recount such a time when the Canaanite King Jabin became a military threat to the Israelites. According to Cundall and Morris (2011:75), ideally the Israelite tribes (if they functioned) as an amphictyonic league should have had a sturdy political and religious relationship. This bond, however, tended to break apart time and again (Cundall & Morris 2011:75). Deborah (prophetess, lawgiver and judge) had the (probably unenviable) task of unifying the loose conglomerate of (possibly unwilling) tribes into a consolidated and organised army. Carr

and Conway (2010:36-37) describe the early Israelite tribes as a ‘very loosely organized whole’ also suggested by Judges 5 as a ‘segmentary society’ that only bonded together in ‘times of great need’ under the leadership of an elder or judge such as Deborah (cf Cundall & Morris 2011:74-77; Constable 2012c). Despite these interruptions in their daily reality, the women of the pre-monarchic period, judging by the archaeological evidence (see 5.2.4.1), probably attempted to create a regular routine in their familial lives. These endeavours were in no doubt helped along by their women’s networks and the familial solidarity.

### 5.3 MARRIAGE AND MOTHERHOOD

#### 5.3.1 The kinship of the family

##### 5.3.1.1 *Mixed marriages*

Early Israelite kinship<sup>329</sup> in its simplest form might have been based on the *bêt āb* (house of the father) and the *bêt ĕm* (house of the mother) and the (harmonious) relationship between these two units (Jdg 14:2-3; McKinlay 1996:123; Bronner 1999:188; Krier 2001:57-58; Dever 2005:56). Apparently, both men and women determined the distinct Israelite kinship structure through endogamous and exogamous marriages. Exogamy<sup>330</sup> may have presented a threat to the ‘stability of the kinship-based society’ (Meyers 1988:183-5; Marsman 2003:62) and albeit against YHWH’s covenantal laws, it was also commonly accepted (Jdg 3:5-6; 12:9) and added to the kinship structure of the Israelite society.

Judges 3:5-6 reports that the Israelites intermarried with the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. According to Judges 3:6, the Israelites, by

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<sup>329</sup> Gench (2003:124-125) discusses the culture of kinship that existed in ancient Israel. According to the Bible, the patriarch Abraham naming Eliezer (Gn 15:21), presumably a close family member (Eliezer 2016. Biblehub.com. From: <http://biblehub.com/topical/e/eliezer.htm>) or possibly a house slave adopted as a son by Abraham (Unger 1988f), as heir in Genesis 15:21 is symbolic of the type of family structure in ancient Israel (Gench 2003:124-125). Cf also Voinov ([sa]:1-9) and Prewitt (1981:87-98) for an analysis of Israelite kinship structure formed by inter alia various marriages in Genesis. Oden (1983:189-205) discusses kinship studies in the stories of the patriarchs. A study of the genealogy that determined the Israelite kinship formation is discussed by Andriolo (1973:1657-1669). She asserts that ‘divergence, invergence [a form of convergence] and segmentation generate the descent structure in the Old Testament’ (Andriolo 1973:1657-1669).

<sup>330</sup> I have not discussed monogamous and polygamous marriages within the proto-Israelite people but opted to describe mixed marriages simply because they went against covenantal laws and as such posed a threat to the lifestyle and customs of the Israelites (Jdg 3:6).



adopting the gods of their marriage partners, also followed their idols, customs and lifestyles. Frevel and Rausche (2012) observes that the threat foreign women posed was mainly to the secular and sacred identity of the Israelites in the Book of Judges that may account for the ban against intermarriage. Israel was considered to be a 'holy unit' and by marrying unholy seed<sup>331</sup> (the nations in Judges 3:6), the sanctity of Israel and probably the priesthood was dishonoured (Frevel & Rausche 2012).

The marriage of Samson to a Philistine woman and his 'unholy alliances' with foreign women that ultimately led to his death, in my opinion, might serve as a model for the violation of the holiness of the Israelite people. Intermarriage temporarily altered the social and religious identity of the Israelite tribes and thereby how Israelite women identified themselves. In Judges 3:6 they were now part of Canaanite society and not a separate people. However, it was against YHWH's will because the Canaanite idols were more dangerous than their soldiers. The Israelites could subjugate the Canaanite nations at times but could not resist worshipping the Canaanite gods (cf Jdg 2:12-13, 28, 35; 8:33-34; 17:4).

There might have been much autonomy and authority concomitant to these new definitions to their personalities and restructuring of families and kinship groups. However, the Book of Judges ascribes the Israelite apostasy to their moral degeneration and oppression by the other nations.

Positive exogamous marriages in which the foreign women were conformed to the Israelite identity are not criticised in the Old Testament (Frevel & Rausche 2012). These foreign women (such as Jael and Achsah) reaffirmed the validity and value of the Israelite identity and kinship. In my opinion, however, it was within a turbulent and violent society that frequently abandoned YHWH's theocracy and His covenantal laws, which bode ill to women, that women had to forge and hold onto their identities as wives and mothers and expand the authority that came from being wives and mothers into the wider community. The priesthood was accountable for the ethical worthiness of the Israelite community (Frevel & Rausche 2012) but seem to have neglected their responsibility, according to

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<sup>331</sup> By unholy seed it may be presumed that just as the proto-Israelites were the children of YHWH and therefore they were to be holy seed, so too the Canaanites were the children of their idols and therefore unholy seed according to YHWH's standards.

Judges 17:6 and 21:25. It was therefore up to women as mothers of pre-monarchic Israel to follow the example of Deborah in Judges 5:7, for example. Inspired by women such as Deborah, the pre-monarchic women could devote themselves to YHWH and His theocracy that was always beneficial to women. From Deborah's example the mothers could educate, inform and instruct, rule and protect their households and community to uphold the moral fabric of the proto- Israelite society. If they were in the same league as Deborah, they would have, above all, taught and instructed their household to uphold the covenantal laws of YHWH and abide by His theocracy.

### 5.3.1.2 *Weddings*

Weddings were the culmination of the time in which a bride was selected, the bride's price agreed upon and the betrothal period. The marriage was usually a negotiation between two families and 'based on cultural factors rather than on the personal preferences' (Ryken et al (eds) 2000b:121) of the bride and bridegroom.<sup>332</sup> The marriages of the daughters of Ibzan (Jdg 12:9) and Achsah (Jdg 1:12) ostensibly ascribed to the above traditional influences.

The new wife usually left her family to join her husband's household and it was 'largely because of the way she functioned in the marriage that she would find her role in society and her fulfillment as a woman' (Marsman 2003:192; cf De Vaux 1997:28). De Vaux (1997:28), however, comments that several marriages in the Old Testaments apparently fall outside this customary practice (Gn 31:26, 43). In the Book of Judges, the concubine of Gideon (although not Israelite) preferred to continue living with her family in Shechem (Jdg 8:31), which allowed Abimelech to affiliate himself with his mother's clan (Jdg 9:1-2). The wife of Samson (a non-Israelite) too remained in her parent's house after the marriage (Jdg 14:8; 15:1-2; De Vaux 1997:28-29).

As she took up the role of wife, a young bride's primary function was to be a mother (Marsman 2003:192). Motherhood was 'considered the chief blessing for women ... a woman's ability to conceive and bear children was considered her most powerful quality' (cf 5.3.1.3; 5.3.2; 5.3.2.1; 5.3.3). With children came a mother's responsibility to suckle

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<sup>332</sup> As cold and business-like as this may appear to be, romantic love also seems to have played its part as in the case of Abraham and Sarah (Gn 11-23), Hannah and Elkanah (1 Sm 1:5), Isaac and Rebecca (Gn 24:66), Jacob and Rachel (Gn 29:18) and possibly Manoah and his wife (Jdg 13 and 14). Isaac may not have chosen his own wife, but he apparently loved his wife.

them, to teach them the ways of the Israelite culture and to protect their ‘rights or privileges’ (Ryken et al 2000b:120-123; 2000c:570-573; cf Deist 2000:247).<sup>333</sup>

### 5.3.1.3 *Authority of the bêt ĕm*

Together the *bêt āb* and *bêt ĕm* were the basic and permanently inter-reliant social and economic units of the pre-monarchic community (cf 5.3.1.1). Though considerable authority was given to ‘the father’s house’ (the *bêt āb*),<sup>334</sup> allusions to the *bêt ĕm* in the Old Testament (Gn 24:28; Ruth 1:8; Canticles 3:4, 8:2) represent the authority and great value of the matriarch’s status in the household of the pre-monarchic Israelite family (Pr 31:10-31; Jdg 14:2-3; Gench 2003:124; Ebeling 2010:28). The war-torn culture endemic to the Israelite nation in the early stages of settlement in the Hill Country necessitated the powerful existence of female authority within the *bêt ĕm*. In my opinion, women may have been cognisant of their power in the establishment of kinship groups and structure through the participation of their female antecedents and the reproductive reputation of the *bêt ĕm*. Therefore, a woman’s ability to bear children would have been accompanied by a great

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<sup>333</sup> Ryken et al (2000c:570-573) report that in addition to kind, nurturing mothers in the Old Testament, there is ‘evidence of cruel mothers and grandmothers’ (cf 2 Ki 6:28-29; 11; 2 Chr 22:10; Lm 2:20; 4:10). This is also true in the ancient Near Eastern societies. In the Mesopotamian creation myth, the Enuma Elis, there is an account of the mother goddess Tiamat who ‘turns against her children and engages them in war with an army of demons and monsters’ (Budin 2015:38). Ryken et al (2000k:1168-1169) report on child sacrifices to Molech by the Israelites (cf Lv 18:21; Dt 18:10; 2 Ki 16:3; 17:17; 21:6; 23:10; Chr 28:3; 33:6). New wives may also have been aware that with childbearing came several difficulties such as a diminished life expectancy. The anticipation of losing a child in an age of high infant mortality rates (Meyers 1997a:28) and the resultant heartache must have played on their minds a lot.

In addition, diseases and warfare laid upon women during the pre-monarchic period the burden of producing many children to ensure that a small number of them lived into adulthood (Meade 1998:19). Only a few women lived past menopause. ‘A woman in Iron 1 Israel would have had nearly two pregnancies for every child who survived to the age of five’ (Meyers 1997a:28; cf Willett 2002:27-42 discussing mortality rates of infants). Bloch-Smith (2009:123) remarks that osteological evidence of Israelite burials (1200-586 BC) shows that infant deaths were more numerous than for older children (cf Otwell 1977:31-66).

<sup>334</sup> Gench (2003:124) comments that the term ‘father’s house’ is symbolic of the patrilineal (descent through the paternal line) and patrilocal (a bride left her father’s house to join her husband’s family) character of the *bêt āb*. In most instances in the Old Testament, references to the *bêt āb* overwhelm those that refer to the *bêt ĕm*. However, in my opinion, this probably has more to do with the idea that ‘references to men are both often intended as generic references to both men and women’ (Gench 2014:124) and thus references to the *bêt āb* are inclusive of the *bêt ĕm*.

Therefore, the implication of male authority and domination over women in the Bible should not be inferred from the term *bêt āb* solely. The traditional view of the *bêt āb* (headed by the patriarch and inclusive of only male accomplishments) as ‘the most important of these kinship groups...’ (Gench 2014:123) should be reconsidered. In terms of contributions to the economy and community of pre-monarchic Israel, the *bêt ĕm* had an equal role to play in the life of the pre-monarchic period.

amount of authority and the title of motherhood commanded much respect in society (Jdg 5:7).

It is the reproductive capacity of women that underscores a distinct difference between the men and women in the *bêt āb* and *bêt ēm*. That is, the embodiment of womanhood in antiquity, as it is in more modern times,<sup>335</sup> was inescapably determined by a woman's ability to produce children (De Vaux 1997:40-44). Though the Old Testament may allude to male infertility as in Genesis 20:16-17,<sup>336</sup> sterility is posed specifically as a female-only concern (Buden 2015:30-31).

Manhood, in contrast, was determined by other factors such as simply being born a man and having great faith in God (cf 1 Ki 2:1-3) in addition to physical strength (cf Jdg 16:30) and military prowess (cf Jdg 11:1; Trumbull 1907). Having a quiver full of children was a blessing from YHWH (Ps 127), but that did not necessarily determine a man's identity.<sup>337</sup>

Because a woman's identity, abilities and behaviour were irrevocably bound to that of her family and household and not individually owned (Gench 2003:124; Peskowitz (1993:15-16),<sup>338</sup> it was her inability to reproduce that was culturally considered to be a disgrace and a burden. Sterility was a severe charge against her character (Deist 2000:234) and implied improper conduct and divine punishment for having committed a sin (Nm 5:11-31; Matthews 2004:102).<sup>339</sup> In Judges 13, Manoah apparently shared his barren wife's dishonour. His hopeful entreaty in Judges 13:8 also denotes confirmation of future parenthood. I believe that there is an indication in Judges 14 of an increasing involvement with his wife and household. The elevation of his wife's status and authority evident in

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<sup>335</sup> The idea that childless women in ancient times were less honoured is echoed in present-day society. Warnock (2001) describes the appearance of childless women as not having experienced the profoundest relationship that may exist and therefore these women are viewed as less than a complete human being as a 'common assumption'.

<sup>336</sup> Here the text implies the infertility of king Abimelech – a consequence of taking Sarah into his household. Biblical texts basically do not focus on a barren man (Byron 2011a).

<sup>337</sup> Psalm 127 also seems to indicate that having many children assisted in bringing victory in battle to a man and thus they brought 'military status' to the father. In this instance, a man was shamed for not having any children and it was a disgrace that befell his entire household. By contrast, for sterile Hannah, the barren wife incurred dishonour on her entire family. Her husband had children by his second wife. Therefore, the disgrace of not having children was hers alone to bear (1 Sm 1:6).

<sup>338</sup> Peskowitz (1993:15-16) describes the plurality of the family in antiquity and Gench (2003:124) the 'collective family identity' that existed in this plurality.

<sup>339</sup> However, the Old Testament does not mention any reproach for a woman's sterility from her husband. In fact, these husbands appear to have remained faithful and loving towards their wives.

Judges 14:2-3 had a favourable impact on his standing in the community as well and seemingly their economic prosperity as implied in Judges 14:12-13. The abundance of linen clothing mentioned in Judges 14:3 may indicate a pre-monarchic type of weaver's 'cottage' industry in the household of Samson's mother. Gugliotto (2000:113) reports that (the pre-monarchic) women did their own spinning and weaving at home which later became home shops that led to a specialised and industrialised industry (see 5.8.2.1; 5.8.2.2; 5.8.2.3; 5.8.3.1).<sup>340</sup> The wife was accepted within her community in the establishment of her new identity as a mother that entrenched her position in her household and society.

### 5.3.2 Be fruitful and multiply

Through oral tradition the divine directive in Genesis 1:28 may have put pressure upon women to bear as many children as they could in the early history of the Israelites.<sup>341</sup> Later, however, the compulsion for women to reproduce was more a result of cultural pressure than it was Biblical edict (Houdman [CEO] 2016).

During the period of the Judges, societal pressure to have numerous children was also dictated by the (cataclysmic) times the proto- Israelites were faced with. Women's intense concentration on their reproductive capabilities may have had to do with their survival as a nation and the preservation of their 'ethnic consciousness' on the highlands

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<sup>340</sup> Evidence of an industrial-size weaving industry that probably originated from early household weaving practices has been uncovered at Beth Shemesh located around Zorah, Samson's birth town (Bromiley et al [eds] 1979:730). The valley of Sorek where Delilah lived is also in the same area. Judges (Jdg 16:13-14) mentions Delilah's weaving skills (cf 5.2.6; Bush 1844:208). Deborah alluded to a textile craft (Jdg 5:30; Schloen 1993:30). Weaving shops in the ancient Near East date back to pre-Sargonic times in Mesopotamia where administrative texts list slaves attached to these establishments (Walton, Matthews & Chavalas 2000b:765). Since weaving was a women's specific task, the women of the household wove the cloth from which they made '...all the family's clothing, bedding and floor coverings...' (cf 5.8.2.1; 5.8.2.2; 5.8.2.3; 5.8.3.1; Dever 2005:27).

The possibility of the existence of a women's 'weaver shop' in the family (cf 5.8.2.1; 5.8.2.2) might have granted Samson added motivation to engage the Philistines in a game of riddles. Judges 14 begins with Samson desiring to marry a Philistine woman whom he saw in Timnah. After the marriage, Samson prepared a wedding banquet during which 30 companions were given to attend to him (Jdg 14:10-11). At the wedding, feast Samson engaged his Philistine guests in a word game. He told them a riddle. If the Philistines could guess the answer they would be rewarded with thirty sets of linen garments (Jdg 14:12). There is a possibility that the women in his family may not have benefitted from their hard work if Samson lost the game. Apparently, Samson was willing to wager women's labour and earnings and use these as pawns in his struggle with the Philistines.

<sup>341</sup> Faust (2016:155-176) discusses the formation of a national and coherent Israelite identity.

of Canaan confronted with their various enemies such as the Philistine (Faust 2016:169).<sup>342</sup>

In addition, women's concerted efforts to reproduce were also determined by environmental and economic factors.<sup>343</sup> Subsequently, a multi-tiered explanation is offered for a woman's concentration on her fertility in the households of the *bêt āb* and *bêt ēm*:

- Firstly, children became vital to the continuation of the society and economy of the Israelites. The adequate defence of an Israelite community against their enemies (and against each other) depended on households having enough 'soldiers'. This includes children who were old enough to assist in the defence of the household (cf Jdg 5:7; 14; 18:1-30; Ps. 127:5).
- Secondly, severe environmental and geographical factors as well as farming labour requirements necessitated as many hands as a family could gather to secure the viability of the land and their existence in the hill lands (Deist 2000:146-165).
- Thirdly, passing on of property (the land inheritance or *nahala*) from one generation to the next in the family could only be possible when there were children (Deist 2000:144; cf Marsman 2003:55; Knowles 2009:19; Ebeling 2010:27).
- Fourthly, the Israelite religion was also contingent upon the survival of certain tribes such as the Levites for religious duties.
- Fifthly, older children played a significant part in ensuring the achievement of communal goals.<sup>344</sup>

The children of a household, therefore, were considered valuable and this merited the careful attention women paid to their fertility.

The great numbers of children recorded in Judges 10:3; 12:8; 13; 11:1-2 are indications of the existence of polygamous marriages together with monogamous marriages (cf Jdg 13:2) in early (pre-monarchic) Israel (Marsman 2003:151).<sup>345</sup> The

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<sup>342</sup> Faust (2016:169) reports on problems he encountered with his idea of the development of an Israelite ethnic consciousness only due to the 'asymmetrical confrontation with the much stronger and dominant Philistines'.

<sup>343</sup> In my opinion, these factors could explain, as Houdman [CEO] (2016) states, why women valued their fertility to the point of idol worship.

<sup>344</sup> Deist (2000:235-236) describes communal goals as including 'securing the right materials, developing or obtaining appropriate skills, choosing the right time and ensuring that the necessary organizational structures are in place.' Therefore, children were much needed to assist with the execution of certain tasks in order to secure 'the satisfaction of all [communal] needs' (insertion mine).

<sup>345</sup> Grubin (1989:63-68) explains that the low fertility rate of Israelite women is due to breastfeeding practices, which led to women giving birth to an average of four children in her life.

narrative of Judges records the thirty sons of Jair (Jdg 10:3), the thirty sons and daughters of Ibzan (Jdg 12:8) and the forty sons and thirty grandsons of Elon (Jdg 12:13). Jephthah's mother may have been a concubine without legal status, which would account for his brother's (fathered by Gilead's legal wife) denial of Jephthah's inheritance (Unger 1988f; Ebeling 2010:27).

A requirement for the households in Judges 10:3; 12:8, 13 to function at an optimum output level was the smooth running of these marital arrangements and the continued harmony between the different and great numbers of family members in the *bêt ĕm* (as well as the father's house, Deist 2000:244-246). The economic facet of the *bêt ĕm*<sup>346</sup> had to remain intact and this would have obligated the cooperation of even striving family members.<sup>347</sup> The continuation of the women's informal network – Judges 11:38 might be indicative of one – that underscored the economic viability of the household (Meyers 2006:248) presumably required cooperation and harmony within a system of heterarchy. Hereby, a wife or wives had the potential to share (equal) power or delegate authority to those members (probably her children) they chose (Meyers 2006:245-251).

Within the heterarchy of the *bêt ĕm* women could gain their authority from different areas and capabilities (Crumley 1995:3) aside from only bearing children.<sup>348</sup> Accordingly, authority could come from being a skilful cook or weaver, aside from childbearing. Thus, a barren wife with some other (economic) capability or higher social standing may have had equal status to a (second) wife who bore children. This could account for why Hannah suffered Peninnah's mocking of her for a long time until she finally reached breaking point in 1 Samuel 1:6.

Nevertheless, this type of authority could not supplant the importance that came

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<sup>346</sup> Ebeling (2010:27) describes the *bêt āb* as including 'the members of the family ... also its economic aspect ... household structures, property and animals as well as people'. A similar definition may be ascribed to the *bêt ĕm* seeing as the wife came with a dowry (*mohar*) that may have included animals, property, slaves, for instance (cf Jdg 1:15; Gn 24:59, 61; 29:24, 29; Marsman 2003:106). Cf Ginzberg and Greenstone (1906) as well as Knight (2011:182-184) and the information on the dowry in ancient Israel presented by these authors.

<sup>347</sup> Knight (2011:181) points out that in most instances it was wealthy men who could afford more than one wife whereas in the villages (pre-monarchic tribal community) poorer men would have been content with only one wife. Whatever their financial constraints, it is more than possible that these (less affluent) men also entered into polygamous marriages (Ebeling 2010:27) for reproduction purposes.

<sup>348</sup> Crumley (1995:3) defines heterarchy 'as the relation of elements to one another when they are unranked or when they possess the potential for being ranked in a few ways'. Thus, three elements (i.e. cooking, weaving and farming duties) may be equal in proportion but derive their importance from 'different realms'.

with bearing children. Motherhood brought along an authority that may have been overshadowed any other type of power in the *bêt ĕm*. The ‘maximum number of children’ was also desirable (Deist 2000:234) and augmented a mother’s authority and social standing, as would have been the case in the great numbers of children mentioned in Judges 10 and 12.

### 5.3.2.1 *Sons and daughters*

The wife of Manoah, being barren, apparently only did what was good and proper according to society once she had given birth to and raised her son, Samson. In Judges 13, she appeared as a somewhat lonely, desperate and demoralised figure whose character in the community might have been defined according to (negative) societal views of female infertility.<sup>349</sup> By comparison in Judges 14:2-3, she evidently acquired the high status that came with motherhood and her equal authority and decision-making power is indicated.

1 Samuel 10-11 demonstrates the lack of appeasement and an ongoing need for children by the many sterile women throughout the Old Testament.<sup>350</sup> Manoah’s prayer in Judges 13:8, probably uttered on behalf of his wife as well (cf Gn 25:21), articulates the childless couple’s desperation for a child. Since motherhood meant elevated status in ancient Israel, Hannah’s desire would have been well understood by her female predecessors Sarah, Rebecca and Rachel as well as the mother of Samson in Judges 13:2.

All was not lost, however. There were other means by which a barren wife could have children. Surrogacy might have allowed the wife of Manoah and probably the wife of

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<sup>349</sup> The wife of Manoah appeared friendless and quite alone in Judges 13, with only her husband as a companion. By comparison, the daughter of Jephthah had a retinue of girls to assist her in Judges 11:38. It is possible that the loneliness of the wife of Manoah as a bride had been extended throughout her marriage. The stigma of infertility might have excluded the wife from the informal women’s network and the congregation of women in the communal courtyard. Here newfound authority through motherhood set her on par with the other women and therefore she would have raised her son Samson in conformity with the ways of all mothers in her society. The fact that Samson did not move his wife into his household might indicate the special bond his mother cultivated with her son, as mentioned above, and her hesitancy to allow a foreign woman into her household. That she had to undergo certain conditions are specified in Judges 13 to give birth to him would have strengthened the relationship between mother and son and his loyalty and commitment to her.

<sup>350</sup> ‘Don’t I mean more to you than ten sons?’ Elkanah’s question in 1 Samuel 1:8 may illustrate a husband’s wish to alleviate his barren wife’s plight for children. Female sterility is a recurring theme in the Old Testament (cf Gn 16:1; 25:21, 30:1; Jdg 13:2). Judges 11:34 relates the daughter of Jephthah as his only child. Having birthed a single child, it is possible that the wife of Jephthah died during childbirth or might have suffered from infertility afterwards. If this is true, then she might also have suffered under societal perceptions of what constituted the worth of a wife, namely birthing as many children as she could as it is recorded in Judges 10:4; 12:9, 14.



Jephthah to legitimately lay claim to children of their own (cf Gn 16:1-2; 30:3; Scholz 2005:61).<sup>351</sup> A husband could also take a second wife or a concubine to bear him children. This practice was allowed in the Israelite culture as possibly indicated in 1 Samuel 1:2.<sup>352</sup> An analogous custom existed in Babylonian societies, as specified in the Hammurabi code (Mendelsohn 1948:24; Collins 1997:109; Budin 2015:44).<sup>353</sup>

The law of the Israelites provided them with a solution to their childlessness, but women nevertheless expressed a profound desire for their own biological offspring. This need is expressed so powerfully in Rachel's entreaty to her husband Jacob: 'Give me children, or I'll die' in Genesis 30:2, in Hannah's oath to God in 1 Samuel 1:11 and to a certain extent in Manoah's prayer of confirmation of the promised child in Judges 13:8. The wife of Jephthah in Judges 11 and Manoah's wife in Judges 13 probably communicated similar sentiments to their husbands. In a community filled with childbearing women, it is most probable that these women experienced a personal perception of a flawed worth and character that could only be amended by giving birth to their own children.

In the dominant cultural ideology bearing children was also a symbol of a woman's value, status and power in her household and that of her society (Darr 1994:98). Deborah in Judges 5:7, for instance, defines herself by the title of 'mother of Israel' and therefore has the authority that is closely associated with motherhood whether biological or symbolic of her guardianship over the pre-monarchic community. There is no suggestion that neither Deborah nor Jael had children and hence it is held that they had authority and status in the community in their own right apart from motherhood. Nevertheless, motherhood had to do with

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<sup>351</sup> The children of the female slaves given to their husbands by Sarah, Rachel and Leah were adopted by the patriarchs and counted as legitimate heirs with the sons of the legal wives (Unger 1988f). A New Egyptian Kingdom papyrus recounts the story of Rennefer granting her younger brother Padiu permission to marry Taiemniut. Taiemniut was the eldest of three children born to a slave girl who may have been bought by Nebnefer, the husband, with the sole purpose of reproduction (Budin 2015:44; Robins 1993:58).

<sup>352</sup> I believe that Peninnah was most probably a second wife who bore Elkanah sons and daughters to make up for Hannah's inability to have children. Despite being barren, Hannah did not have to give up her status as a first wife. Marsman (2003:150-151) reports that like the 'Old Babylonian sisterhood adoption contracts and the Nuzi marriage contracts' that entitled women to retain their position 'as first wife within marriage ... no alleged barren wife loses her position in the Hebrew Bible' (Knowles 2009:19). The Midrash clarifies that Hannah was the first wife, which would explain Elkanah's love for her as stated in 1 Samuel 1:5 (Kadari 2009).

<sup>353</sup> The Assyrians, Hurrians and Canaanites were also polygamous societies. Marrying more than one wife was a practice that may have reflected a man's wealth and a practical solution to a (first) wife's infertility (Mendelsohn 1948:24-25).

doing what is proper and right with holiness and order. Therefore, it was important for women to conform with the cultural perceptions of what was good and pious behaviour of women to be favoured by God. The great number of children mentioned in the Book of Judges (Jdg 10:4; 12:9, 14) reflects the prosperity and wealth of a family and the authority and standing of a mother in her household and community. Children increased women's authority and extended their control over the domestic processes in the *bêt ĕm*.

Having children protected women from social disgrace and being rejected or divorced by their husbands (Byron 2011b). In the event of her husband's death, children could also prevent a mother's destitution (Ex 20:12; Lev 19:3; Dt 5:16; Meade 1998:4; Skolnik [ed] 2007:618). As in ancient Mesopotamia, Israelite women eagerly desired sons (Meade 1998:12-13; Nemet-Nejat 1999:88), particularly if these sons were heirs who could take charge of the father's property and take care of their mother. Subsequently, greater authority was given to these mothers who produced heirs as their standing in the household was closely associated with that of their (firstborn) sons (Jdg 14:2-3; Byron 2011b; cf Marsman 2003:197).<sup>354</sup>

The education of their daughters was probably intended to help them acquire skills and information regarding household tasks (cf 5.5; 5.5.1; 5.5.2.1 a, b). In doing so, mothers planned for their daughters to take control and manage the household economic and social processes. Israelite parents were in favour of a family that included both sons and daughters (Marsman 2003:252).<sup>355</sup> Daughters were therefore also valued, and the honour of the household was intimately tied to their reputation (Gn 34:1-31). Daughters could bring dishonour to a family (Gn 34). Le Roux (2015:505-519) states that though Achsah brought shame on her father by asking him for land with water. He, however, showed her kindness

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<sup>354</sup> Because a mother's status was so closely attached to that of a male heir, she would pursue the elevation and advancement of her son to increase her own standing (1 Ki 2:19; Marsman 2003:240-241; Byron 2011b). Apparently, the mothers of Samson and Micah actively sought the advancement of their sons in the community. Judges 14:1-5 indicates Samson's parent's objections to his chosen wife, probably because she was not Israelite. Judges 17:2-5 relates Micah's mother as giving him a gift of hundreds of silver pieces to enhance the household shrine. It can be imagined that the latter would naturally strengthen his position in the community as people would flock to the shrine to worship before the new idol placed within.

A mother raised and imparted to her son that his allegiance and loyalty was firstly to her, then his sisters and lastly to his wife. Consequently, a new wife possibly would have experienced the loneliness of a stranger within her household until she in turn gave birth to a son and repeated this cycle of social conditioning of her male offspring (Simkins [sa]; Meade 1998:16-18).

<sup>355</sup> Bet Hillel (in Ofek 2005:617) states that one son and one daughter fulfilled the decree in Genesis 1:28. Therefore, a balanced family would have been the ideal (Yarbrough 1993:41-42).

and respect as well as his willingness to grant his daughter her wish.<sup>356</sup> In my opinion, Caleb's benevolence towards his daughter (Jdg 1:14-15) confirms the idea that daughters were esteemed as much as their brothers. Daughters could also raise a family's status, as in the case of Miriam in the book of Exodus and Deborah (Jdg 4-5), particularly under YHWH's covenantal rule.

There was also a certain financial value attached to daughters as Judges 12:9-10 appears to indicate. Ibzan of Bethlehem gave his thirty daughters away in marriage, which must have consisted a considerable financial loss to his household because of the great number of dowries involved. In my opinion, however, he seemed to have made compensation for his losses by marrying his thirty sons to wives from outside the clan (to richer families perhaps?), thereby filling up the family's coffers again. Ibzan seemingly had no difficulty marrying all his daughters outside his clan. This conveys the idea that they were probably extremely suitable girls who, apart from their dowries, possessed some great skills such as cooking or weaving (cf 5.7; 5.8).

To these daughters were passed the secrets of women's domestic duties and womanhood. These teachings enforced and maintained the status of their mother (Geffen 2007:658). It was also possible for daughters to inherit alongside their brothers or in the absence of sons (Job 42:15; Nm 27:1-11).<sup>357</sup>

### 5.3.3 Barren women and ugly women

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<sup>356</sup> Le Roux (2015: 505-519) reports that it is the way in which Caleb handled his daughter that conveys the important message of the Book of Judges concerning women. Women were valued alongside the men in their community; they had equality and autonomy in the covenantal rule of YHWH. Their horrendous treatment was at the hands of evil and sinful men who stepped outside of YHWH's covenantal laws of love, unity and loyalty.

<sup>357</sup> Consequently, the daughter of Jephthah, being an only child, would have inherited. Daughters would have been raised to obey their parents and accede to their control over their lives (Marsman 2003:242) but perhaps also with the knowledge that certain privileges and power come with being a woman. It is the Egyptian sage Ptah Hotep (ca 2000 BC) who declared that women should be loved, protected and cared for as well as mentioning other powerful facets of a woman that may be a reason why she had to be subdued: 'If you are a man of note, found for yourself a household, and love your wife at home, as it befits. Fill her belly, clothe her back, unguent is the remedy for her limbs. Gladden her heart, as long as she lives; she is a goodly field for her lord (a reference to her fertility). But hold her back from getting the mastery. Remember that her eye is her storm wind, and her vulva and mouth her strength' (Bullough, Shelton & Slavin 1988:32). Perhaps the pre-monarchic Israelite sons and daughters who were intermixed with the Canaanites were raised with a more or less similar version of the aforementioned instructions by their parents. The aforementioned ideology by Ptah Hotep, however, was contrary to the ideal of equality that YHWH had for both men and women.

Within the context of the early Israelite ideology of beauty, a barren woman lived within a cultural construct that saw her as defective. The fertility of women in Judges 10:4; 12:9, 14 stands in contrast with the barrenness of a wife in Judges 13.

A barren wife did not have the same amount of authority and status in her family and society (cf 5.3.4). The community blamed a women's infertility on a lack of the inner value that was thought of as beautiful and therefore highly prized by society. The state of infertility in a barren woman was considered to be associated with sin in the ancient Near East as well as Israel (cf Gn 16:4; 29:31; Marsman 2003:196). The Israelites held the belief that YHWH, who was responsible for blessing a woman with children, would only 'close her womb' if she had committed a grave sin or was lacking in some inner value (Van der Toorn 1985:85-86; Marsman 2003:242). It is within this concept that Genesis 30:2, 22; 49:25; Exodus 13:2; Numbers 8:16; Judges 13:5 and 1 Samuel 1:5-6 should be read.

In Judges 13:5, the Angel of the Lord declared that the sterility of the wife of Manoah would soon come to an end. The woman, according to cultural perception, would have found to be in favour with YHWH. He would open her womb and bless her with a child. Giving birth to Samson and raising an heir were life-transforming events that placed the redeemed woman into normal society and substantially elevated her status and authority (cf 2.6.2.1; 4.4.3.1 b; 4.3.4.2). In my mind, prior to Samson's birth, however, the wife might have suffered great anxiety, being continuously exposed to thoughts of sin guilt in the public mind. According to communal opinion, the wife's infertility was the result of some 'moral flaw'. Marred by suspicions of impropriety, she would have offered many prayers and sacrifices to YHWH to conceive (see Van der Toorn 1985:86).

The wife of Manoah not only possessed the 'non-ideal female body' (Le Roux 2015:503),<sup>358</sup> but her infertility also made her physically unattractive. She was not considered unappealing because of an absence of good looks but because she did not possess that indomitable life force that would allow her to overcome her adversity, i.e. her infertility. Shmidman (1998) explains that it was this force of life invoked by the Old Testament as beauty in the mindset of the ancient Israelites and that was absent in the inner

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<sup>358</sup> Le Roux (2015:503-521) discusses women in the time of the Judges as the non-preferred body type but who seem to have been more heroic and courageous than their male counterparts culturally considered to be the ideal body type.

life of the barren woman that would make her appear ‘pitiful’ and lonely (Marsman 2003:242) and powerless, as the wife of Manoah apparently was. The pre-monarchic Israelites had a unique concept of beauty. Though physical beauty was not considered inconsequential in the Old Testament, it was not the only standard for marrying a wife (Feintuch 2003; cf Pr 5:19). Within this paradigm, the Biblical view of beauty was more closely associated with good inner values than it relates to good looks (cf Pr 31:10:31, see Dryness (1985: 421-432), Ryken et al (2000a:82-85) and Van Hoozer (2005:833) for their reports on the distinctive attributes of beauty in the Old Testament and the idea that beauty is found in the experience of worshipping God. Pure and good inner values were considered to be beautiful by YHWH. Therefore, a barren woman would have been considered unattractive on the inside and thus unappealing physically (Ryken 2005:459).

Carrying the stigma of the barren woman, the wife of Manoah’s primary means of gaining authority, that is through motherhood, remained out of reach. In addition, if she lacked a skill that could set her above all the other women in her household, or even physical beauty, she truly was lonely and without authority and the privileges that came with good looks and naturally fertility (Penchansky 2008:28-29).

The authority held by women in early (pre-monarchic) Israel was more of an informal than formal nature (Gottwald 2001:164).<sup>359</sup> The existence of an unofficial state of female authority becomes problematic (particularly when dependent upon a woman’s fertility and concomitant beauty) when studied in view of the archaeological and textual records of antiquity which reveal the absence of any kind of significant and continued female authority in ancient Israelite (Meyers 1999a:33-37; 2005:11; 2006:247; 2014:19-20; cf Fuchs 2005:214).<sup>360</sup> Penchansky (2008:1-6) views the matriarch Leah as (a fertile yet) powerless woman dominated by her younger, more beautiful and therefore more powerful (and yet infertile) sister. This is a reversal of roles in powerless sterile women

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<sup>359</sup> Gottwald distinguishes between (female) authority as ‘the culturally legitimated right to make decisions and command obedience’ and (female) power as ‘the ability to affect control despite or independent of official authority’ (Gottwald 2001:164).

<sup>360</sup> Both Fuchs (2005:214) and Meyers (1999a:33-37; 2014:19-20) declare the Bible and archaeology as failing to deliver concise accounts of women’s daily existence. Though the Romans are later in history, Meyers (1999a:33-37; 2014:19-20) states that the study of the domestic and economic processes in early Israelite households as well as parallel studies of societies with similar domestic and economic systems [about the authority of upper class Roman women] may allow scholars to construct the story of female authority in early Israel.

and powerful fertile women that existed in ancient Israelite and Near Eastern society that is not often encountered in the writings of scholars.

Having children and being a mother became crucial to her to comply with ‘her expected societal role’. Subsequently, a sterile woman such as the wife of Manoah and possibly the wife of Jephthah would want to eliminate her dishonour ‘by any means at her disposal [discussed below] which she feels may help’ ([insertions mine], Mead 1998:21).

#### 5.3.4 Mandrakes, magic and prayers

Ancient Near Eastern therapeutic medical texts frequently combine the two types of treatment – the medical (*asûtu*) and the magical (*āšipûtu*) – to alleviate among others infertility (cf 4.6.4.7) and any peril that may befall a pregnant woman (Biggs 1995:1914; cf Van der Toorn 1985:86; Bock 2002:1-2; Budin 2015:42).<sup>361</sup> Some Sumerian texts known as SA ZI. GA are inter alia concerned with fertility problems in women. A 600-400 BC tablet, probably from Babylon, describes methods for the treatment of infertility and gynaecological ailments and pregnancy tests (see Figure 5.4; Knowles 200:20).



Figure 5.4 Ancient recipes (The recipes on this tablet cover barrenness, pregnancy tests, and treatment for gynaecological conditions. Dated about 600–400 B.C.; likely from Babylon [Knowles 2009:20])

Alike their Near Eastern counterparts, infertile Israelite women may have availed themselves upon those ‘who practiced therapeutic medicine, composed of surgical and

<sup>361</sup> Treatments for diseases (and infertility) included treatments from both medical and magical ‘sources’. The numerous medical texts found at Asshur belonged to Kisir-Assur, a self-identified exorcist belonging to the temple of Assur. Biggs (1995:1914) theorises that ‘if he ... made professional use of these tablets, it would appear there was considerable fluidity and overlap in the use of prescriptions by both categories of healing professionals’ (cf Bock 2002:2-8).

herbal treatments (*asûtu*) ... or *āšipûtu* who practiced divinatory and religious medicine' (Teall 2014:2). Such a woman may have used the herbal treatments (prescribed by a 'doctor') together with magic including invocations, the wearing of amulets and certain colours such as red as apotropaic devices (see 4.6.1.1; 4.6.2.1-4.6.2.6; 4.6.3; 4.6.3.1-4.6.3.5 and 4.6.4.5-4.6.4.8; Willett 2001; Bock 2003:7-8, 13; Teall 2014:4; Budin 2015:44-45).

For those women on their isolated farmsteads, as may be the case with the wife of Manoah (cf Jdg 13:9), it is most likely that home treatments would have been selected (cf Biggs 1995:1912). Home remedies for infertility would have included the use of mandrakes (see Figure 5.5; Gn 30:14-17) and pomegranates (Knowles 2009:20). Women such as the wife of Manoah (cf Jdg 13) and Hannah (cf 1 Sm 1:19-20) may have heeded Numbers 5:11-13 that advocated the ingestion of a mixture of Tabernacle dust and holy water for a faithful wife to conceive (Knowles 2009:19). In the 'bitter water' ordeal (Knowles 2009:19; Nm 15:11-31), women under suspicion of infidelity were required to drink a mixture of dust from the floor of the Tabernacle and water known as the bitter water (Nm 11:23). If guilty, the bitter water would cause them to become afflicted with numerous ailments, including infertility. It is possible that Hannah and the mother of Samson, before the birth of their sons in an effort to become fertile, ingested the Tabernacle floor dust and water as the mixture induced fertility in faithful wives. Knowles (2009:19) comments that 'barren women swallowed dust or dirt' as fertility magic in efforts to conceive.

Praying to YHWH who was in control of a woman's fertility was another measure to enable conception. The barren woman could entreat God herself or her husband could make supplication for her (cf Jdg 13:8; Sm 1:11; Gn 25:21). If all else failed, a barren woman who entered into her marriage with a considerable dowry hoped her husband would not (easily) divorce her. If he did, he would have had to return her dowry that was originally intended to be used by her in the event of becoming a widow (Marsman 2003:107). Such a husband risked suffering economic loss if he was a man who lacked personal wealth.<sup>362</sup>

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<sup>362</sup> The daughters of Ibzan (Jdg 12:9) were apparently married with substantial dowries. The wealth they brought into their new households would have prevented their husbands from easily divorcing them for reasons of infertility, for instance. Achsah (Jdg 1:14-15) enlarged whatever wealth her husband, Othniel, possessed. She was given land, presumably as a dowry when she married Othniel. Her father Caleb also granted her request for a second portion of land. Achsah's demand for more land probably occurred sometime after her marriage. Her father granted his daughter her wish, depicting a picture of the benevolent *paterfamilias*. It is possible that Caleb intended to make it very difficult for Othniel to divorce Achsah. Another parent who might have been able to give her daughter(s) sizeable dowries was the mother of Micah.



Figure 5.5 Mandrake (<https://www.fotalia.com/tag%22mediterranean%20mandrake%22#>)

## 5.4 HOUSEHOLD ECONOMICS

### 5.4.1 The value of women's labour

An analogue for women's labour in the pre-monarchic tribal community and their economic worth is to be found in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC text *Oeconomicos* by Xenophon. The ancient writer understood that the duties performed by women in their households had commercial value and even though it lacked 'exchange value' (Mueller 2014:125; Pomeroy 1994), the skills performed by women in the domestic sphere had the potential to be 'turned into exchange value profits' (Mueller 2014:125; cf Brock 1994:338-346).<sup>363</sup> Mueller refers to the ability of Greek women of the aristocracy who in times of financial constraints, such

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Her wealth is evident in Judges 17:2. The daughter of Jephthah might also have entered into marriage with wealth if it was not for the ill-conceived vow made by her father.

<sup>363</sup> According to Deist (2000:143), defining the economic system of pre-monarchic Israel can be tricky. The modern mind should not try to interpret the economy of subsistence societies and those societies without 'a currency system' [both descriptions fit pre-monarchic Israel rather aptly] in terms of today's definitions (Deist 2000:143). It has been proposed that the market economy of modern Israel which underpins the economic system of the Western nations did not exist in ancient Israel. Nam, referring to 2 Kings 4, however, argues that a market economy, albeit on a smaller scale, did exist in ancient Israel (Nam 2014; Polanyi 1944). It is generally believed that exchange in the absence of money helped the Israelite society to determine how products were to be distributed. Israelite women, being of matching status in their community, probably exchanged goods as part of their mutual (reciprocal) communal association.

For instance, an Israelite woman may have exchanged extra grain to a female neighbour (probably a relative) for oil. This example of reciprocity and a second manner of exchange, namely redistribution, seems to form the basis of Israelite economy in the highlands (Nam 2014; Polanyi 1944). To establish women's involvement in these modes of exchange through archaeology is difficult. Nam mentions the restrictions within the archaeological discipline, as do Meyers who writes that 'archaeology cannot easily or directly be used to reconstruct the place of women'. Both Nam and Meyers state that archaeology together with a social methodological interpretation of data offer improved awareness and information of early economies (Nam 2014; Meyers 1999a:37). With these approaches, stories of the daily reality of women as they participated in an economic system in which 'goods' were 'produced, distributed and consumed' are easier to study and reconstruct (Haviland 1996:186; Deist 2000:143).



as that caused by the Peloponnesian War, turned towards their knowledge of wool production and textile production to enlarge their income (Mueller 2014:125; Xenophon, *Oeconomicos* 7:6).<sup>364</sup>

Similarly, the pre-monarchic women could supplement the income of their households by their skills in weaving and sewing (for instance, according to Proverbs 31:14, 24; Lockyer 1967:19), particularly when male economic contributions diminished due to the frequency of warfare in the period of the Judges (Shafer-Elliott 2014b:123).<sup>365</sup> In this manner, women could keep the household economy going through a system of exchange and redistribution.<sup>366</sup> Exchange of goods between women in the community would also serve to alleviate hardships in times of economic distress. Israelite women in all likelihood followed the example of their Egyptian counterparts and enlarged the family's income by growing modest vegetable gardens and working as seamstresses.<sup>367</sup> In addition, Israelite women analogous to Egyptian women could own property (Jdg 1:14-15), trade and do business (cf Pr 31:10-31).

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<sup>364</sup> Indeed, in Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 2:7, a household textile workshop was started by the female members in the household of Aristarchus (in Mueller 2014:125).

<sup>365</sup> Under these circumstances, the establishment of household textile workshops was probably facilitated.

<sup>366</sup> The two modes of exchange, namely reciprocity and redistribution, thought to be basis of the ancient economy as communally rooted phenomena (Nam 2014), would also have served as an 'economic foundation' existing within the relationship of the women in the 'informal networks' they established in early Israel. Meyers describes this relationship as one of 'cooperation and companionship' in which 'solidarity' was formed as women went about sharing daily tasks.

Meyers points out that the location of equipment and installations for bread-making associated with women's labour reveal that women from 'several households would have worked together' (Meyers 2006:248). In a similar vein, it would then have been easy for women to set up a textile workshop with which to boost the income of their individual households. Although redistribution involves the dispersal of goods to a central authority which then apportions these in another form to the people, this type of exchange would have been applicable to the economy of Monarchic Israelite.

However, during the pre-monarchic period, the Tabernacle at Shiloh and minor Israelite temples functioned not only as religious centres, but probably also as business and commercial centres analogous to the ancient Near Eastern temple complexes (cf Breyfogle 1910:407; Marsman 2003:491; Bertman 2003:128; Suter 2007:319-320, 323). In this way, the Tabernacle could fulfill the role as a central authority necessary for the redistribution mode of exchange in pre-monarchic period. In the same manner that women contributed to the religious life of the Tabernacle (cf Chapter Four), they would also have participated in its economic affairs.

<sup>367</sup> Thompson (2010) comments on the economic enterprises of ancient Egyptian women. For example, Thompson notes that an ancient Egyptian text records a woman buying a slave, for whom she paid half of the sum in clothing and the other by borrowing from her neighbors. A receipt indicates that a second woman obtained a few clothing items, sixteen goats and a bull as payment for work done by her slave. From this information, it can be assumed that the first woman intended to pay back the loan she had made by hiring out her slave for labour.

### 5.4.2 The daily grind

In the pre-monarchic Israelite community, women's daily reality revolved around 'household economics' (Shafer-Elliott 2014b:119) to which all their day-to day activities including food production and preparation, weaving, reproduction and childrearing were bound (Nam 2014). Meyers describes the 'economic role of the family' as 'all pervasive' since 'the core of the everyday life of smallholders' was directed by 'certain daily, seasonal and annual activities ...' (cf Jdg 13:9; Meyers 1997a:23; Shafer-Elliott 2014b:120). An uncomplicated subsistence way of life where a woman had the support and loyalty of her predominantly agrarian community<sup>368</sup> did not exclude her from a harsh existence made up of a multitude of bone-wearing tasks. In Genesis 3:19 God announced to Adam and Eve: 'By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food ...' This declaration was brought to full fruition when the later generation of the proto-Israelites settled in the severe environment and climate of the Hill Country.<sup>369</sup> Feinberg Vamosh (2013) reports that archaeological discoveries stand as witness to the hard work that inexorably controlled a woman's everyday reality.<sup>370</sup> Hours spent working over ground looms and grinding stones were the cause of bone disorders discovered on the remains of female skeletons unearthed during excavations. Analyses of these remains found small nodes that had developed on women's vertebrae as well as arthritis in the neck from carrying large bundles of firewood and from squatting over hearth fires, as well as signs of wearing on ankle bones (Feinberg Vamosh 2013; Ebeling 2010:137).<sup>371</sup>

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<sup>368</sup> Deist describes the relationship shared by the community (or the family, tribe or clan) as one 'bound by fate' because they shared an allocated space (farm), which meant women felt they owed each other their assistance and trust (Deist 2000:144; cf also Meyers 1997a:32-39; Meyers 2006:248 who comments that women also supported each other because of shared work tasks).

<sup>369</sup> Deist (2000:119-142) provides a more in-depth description of the 'environmental forces' that formed the lives of the ancient Israelites as well as imagery in nature and their metaphorical meaning (cf Meyers 1988:47-71; King & Stager 2001:86-87; Borowski 2003:1-6 for the importance of environmental elements in the daily lives of the Israelite highlanders; and Stager 1985:5-11; Gibson 2001:66-113; Faust 2005:204-219; Scheepers 2010:287-293; for technological innovations particularly in the Iron II period associated with the environmental challenges faced by the Israelites).

<sup>370</sup> Meyers associates a good amount of work done by women, particularly food preparation and textile production, basket making and the manufacture of pottery (tasks in a gendered division of labour usually delegated to women) with 'highly specialized' technology. Women's work was also more diverse, requiring more skill than male-oriented tasks (Meyers 1997a:25-27).

<sup>371</sup> Macalister (1912a:62-63, 67) reports on his excavations at Gezer in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The archaeologist exhumed about 200 bones of adult individuals. About  $\frac{1}{5}$  of these bones showed 'the anterior astragalar notches at the ankles associated with squatting'. The skeleton of a female displayed 'lateral curvature of the spine; disease of the articular processes of the third and fourth neck vertebrae'.

Relatives, children and during certain farming activities a woman's husband worked alongside her (see Bancroft 2009:43; Women in the Bible 2016. Family Work and Religion in Bible Times. From: <http://www.womeninthebible.net/bible-extras/family-work-religion/>).

Similarly, in the work areas inside and outside her family residence, a woman processed and prepared food and beverages, spun and wove material for clothing, tended the gardens and orchards, collected fuel for the household and in between cared for her children in a seemingly ceaseless rhythm of routine, provide and nurture. A 2050-1800 BC kitchen model from a twelfth dynasty Egyptian tomb shows women workers grinding, brewing beer and baking (see Figure 5.6; Van der Beek 2016). Bread and beer-making (made of fermented bread) were usually women's tasks (Bancroft 2009:26; Dollinger 2015a). Figure 5.6 may also portray a typical working day in the life of Egyptian, Israelite and ancient Near Eastern women from one age to the next in antiquity.



Figure 5.6 Ancient Egyptian workers (2050-1800BC 12th dynasty model of Egyptian workers, grinding, baking and brewing [<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/296252481723992715/>])

The mud brick house of the proto-Israelite, with its central courtyard and cool interior, offered women no respite from their endless tasks. Evidence at Iron Age I Tel Dan reveal that numerous tasks were performed in a linear manner that is one task after another were carried out in the dwelling by the various (female) members of the household (Ilan 2011:151). The lived spaces<sup>372</sup> of the pre-monarchic women naturally were their houses (domestic spaces), which they manipulated and transformed into productive and

<sup>372</sup> Matthews (2003:12-20) comments on three categories: physical space, imagined space and 'lived space'.

reproductive as well as consumption spaces (Matthews 2003b:13; Hardin 2011:15). As in every household throughout antiquity and beyond, the pre-monarchic Israelite house had certain areas in which women rather than men performed their tasks (Kent 1984:2; Meyers 2003:428; Mau 2011:147).<sup>373</sup> In these spaces women imprinted their shared kinship identity, their economic and ritual behaviour and by all means their individual personalities and beliefs.<sup>374</sup> At Iron Age Tel Megiddo, for instance, evidence for women's domestic (and family sacred ritual) activities can be found in the courtyard house uncovered in Area K, Level K-4. The material culture found shows the various rooms and the courtyard where food was prepared and consumed, as well as where the storage of food occurred and where crafts were done. The women of this household used wood or dung as fuel for cooking purposes and regularly kept the floors of the house well swept as indicated by the layered form of the sediment and their fine-grained composition (Shahack-Gross 2011:32).

Presumably, the Canaanite city counterparts of rural Israelite women were also engaged in household food and craft production and consumption as well as social reproduction and domestic cleaning as the evidence coming from domestic structures in Area S in the lower city of Hazor (cf Figure 5.7 and Figure 5.8) attest (Marom & Zuckerman 2011:49, 51).<sup>375</sup> These evidences appear to show that the ordinary women's work and reality in the Late Bronze Age and the Iron Age were on the whole uniform despite ethnicity.<sup>376</sup> Women's lived spaces were always and only to be found in their houses and tended to be communal and shared with other women (in the extended family

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<sup>373</sup> Meyers (2003:428) notes that 'this did not involve fully segregated space with no crossover of gendered activity'. These common spaces in agricultural households however, were utilised in different ways by men and women 'sequentially or in overlapping temporal units' and were dependent on the time of day, season and the type of task that had to be done (Meyers 2002b:18-19). Mau, however, suggests that the existence of gender hierarchy, as these segregated work areas might indicate, was less pronounced than in subsequent eras (Mau 2011:147). Therefore, the identification of defeated and subjugated men with women, their work and equipment in antiquity (cf Jdg 4:17-21; 9:53; 16:21) was often emblematic of cultural perceptions about strong men and weak women (which was not the image of men and women YHWH had intended for both gender groups under His theocracy) that increased after the Iron I age (Kruger 2007:162).

<sup>374</sup> In Chapter Four (cf 4.6.1.1; 4.6.2.1-4.6.2.6; 4.6.3; 4.6.3.1-4.6.3.5 and 4.6.4.5-4.6.4.8) women's religious behaviour in their houses, which they decorated with sacred icons and paraphernalia, was discussed. In this chapter women's economic behaviour inside and outside their lived spaces is also mentioned.

<sup>375</sup> Marom and Zuckerman (2011:42) refer to Area S as 'an ideal candidate for the reconstruction for the development of a domestic quarter within the context of a Canaanite city'. Their investigations on activities here are mostly derived from studying animal bone and faunal deposits (Marom & Zuckerman 2011:42-48).

<sup>376</sup> Panitz-Cohen (2011:85-106) provides an informative study on the pottery assemblages of two Late Bronze Canaanite houses 475 and 315 at Tel Batash. From this research, it is possible to determine which rooms in their houses were utilised by the women of the household for storage, food preparation and other economic and social activities.

or *mišpāhâ*). Evidence for (women's) communal activities and shared space is found in the varying diameters of cooking pots found in early Iron Age levels of Tel Dan (see Ilan 2011:145-146). These show that food was prepared (by women) and consumed in different quantities sufficient for feasting or communal repasts (see Ilan 2011:145-146).<sup>377</sup>



Figure 5.7 Area S in lower city of Hazor (Marom & Zuckerman 2011:40-41)

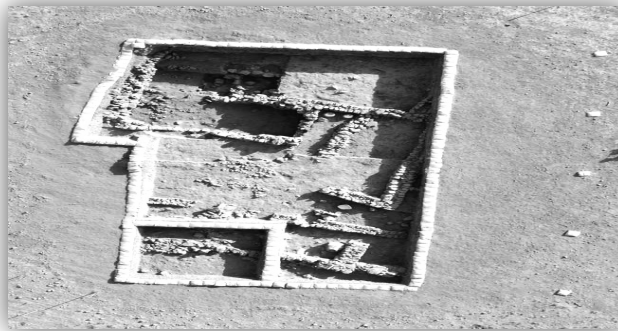


Figure 5.8 Excavation of Area S (Marom & Zuckerman 2011:40-41)

A woman's daily reality was consistently occupied by work assignments and filled with the women they worked with in the courtyards. Six days a week women's work, particularly in the form of food production, the preparation of it and reproduction, safeguarded the household from economic famine.<sup>378</sup> Like Egyptian women, most proto-

<sup>377</sup> Ilan (2011:146) also points out that cooking pots decrease in diameter in Stratum IVB of Tel Dan ('the latest Iron I horizon'). He furthermore adds that 'perhaps this is an indication that communal food preparation and consumption was less and that food was more often consumed in smaller groups, i.e. within the framework of nuclear families' (Ilan 2011:146).

<sup>378</sup> Analogies exist in a fair number of Egyptian women gaining leadership status during the New Kingdom (circa 1550-1069 BC) such as the military-inclined Ahhotep and Queen Tiy, a commoner who became the famous royal wife of Amenhotep III (1390-1352 BC), known in diplomatic circles outside Egypt (Fletcher 2011). Cf also Robins (2001:13).

Israelite women were agricultural workers, labouring on their farms next to their husbands. In the period of the Judges, when men were regularly off to war, died in skirmishes or suffered other mishaps, it was more likely the women who took over the management of the farms in addition to their domestic tasks (cf Jdg 1:3; 2:14-15; 4:1, 17:6; 20:1-46; Hunt 2009:43).

Though the Israelites enjoyed periods of peace, they were often going to war against their enemies.<sup>379</sup> This period is also marked by disputes between the tribes (Fishbane 2002:387, 391). If it was possible, the Israelites would have possibly wanted to keep the wars (as recorded in the narratives of Judges 1:3; 2:14-15; 4:1; 6 short because long wars were expensive (Goldstein 2003:215; cf Ryken et al 2000:76-80)).<sup>380</sup> Thus it appears that at times war, conflict and land settlement became part of the daily reality of some pre-monarchic women (cf 5.2.4; 5.2.4.1). The authors/editors of the Book of Judges bring attention to the families of the Danites on their journey for new territory (Jdg 18:21). The little children mentioned in Judges 18:21 were naturally accompanied by their mothers. Experiencing the terrors of each day while taking care of their children as well as the daily tasks of cooking, collecting wood for the fires and possibly tending the animals at each camping site required a great deal of fortitude on behalf of the women. According to Judges 18:21, the Danites took all their possessions with them (Ellicott 2016c); therefore, it may be inferred that women's specific equipment would have been used during their journey and in their new city (Jdg 18:28-29).

It was their economic contributions (cf Jdg 14:12-13) that helped to sustain the households while the destroyed animals and crops were replaced. The unknown woman of

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<sup>379</sup> Not only were the villagers and farmers in danger of the other nations in Canaan, but also from the many inter-tribal skirmishes that occurred (Jdg 18:1-20; 20:1-46). Several factors obstructed full collaboration between the Israelite tribes (Cundall & Morris 2011:75). Among these impeding forces were the 'incomplete nature of the conquest' and geographical elements that divided the tribes and hindered them from forming a cohesive entity (Cundall & Morris 2011:75-77).

<sup>380</sup> Nonetheless, any curtailment of armed conflict, the wars impacted negatively on the economy, interrupting the system of exchange and redistribution operating in the Book of Judges as well as the availability of resources and the management of labour (Goldstein 2003:215). This state of affairs naturally would have affected the pre-monarchic daily lifestyle of the women (and men; cf 5.2.4; 5.2.4.1). In general, constant civil war would have obstructed economic growth and damaged the prosperity of the pre-monarchic community (Goldstein 2003:215; Cundall & Morris 2011:226). Judges 6:2-6 relates the economic impoverishment the Midianites, Amelkites and other people inflicted on the Israelites. The periods of peace probably assisted the proto-Israelites to regain economic prosperity. However, I believe that it is *inter alia* the women and their skills and abilities that acted as a buffer against entire societal collapse because they could assist with the economic survival of their households.

Thebez, for example, presumably took her grinding stone with her while they were hiding in the tower from Abimelech and his troops (Jdg 9:53; Pett 2013c). During times of warfare the women probably occupied the economic and organisational tasks left unoccupied by the men with as much ‘passion’ and boldness as the men on the battlefield (Fishbane 2002:388). It was therefore possible for the proto-Israelite women to acquire leadership positions during these times of duress (Jdg 5:7; Hackett 1985:19).

### 5.4.3 The family

A daughter born to the family was raised in a large, extended household consisting of several generations as well as ‘unrelated people’ such as ‘slaves, hired hands and others’ (Jdg 17-18; Borowski 2003:22). An extended family was a prerequisite for survival in an agrarian/pastoral lifestyle as the extensive amount of subsistence duties necessitated a larger workforce.<sup>381</sup> Therefore, the arrival of a daughter was welcomed as *inter alia* another addition to the ‘workforce and workplace’ that constituted early households (Meyers 1997a:23-24, 27). A woman was raised in ‘a multiple family compound’ such as those found at Raddana, Ai and Meshash, consisting of two or three separate farmhouses either entirely independent or connected to each other (Stager 1985:18; Borowski 2003:22).<sup>382</sup> The inhabitants of a village might comprise one household (*bêt āb*) or several and was collectively called a *mišpāhā* (Meyers 1997a:37, 39; Faust 2000:29-30; Borowski 2003:22).<sup>383</sup> Faust (2000:31) observes that Gideon’s burial in the tomb of his father Joash

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<sup>381</sup> Shafer-Elliott (2014b:120-121), Borowski (2003:22) and Faust (2000:19) provide more details about the various people that made up a typical early Israelite household; also see Stager (1985:18) who mentions Tannous (1944:537) comparing Israelite housing configurations to the Arab village of Beitin built in the 19<sup>th</sup> century AD. At Beitin the domestic familial group is a kind of multiple family household known in Arabic as *za‘ila*, the ‘joint family’. Lutfiyya (1966:142-143) describes the *za‘ila* in the following manner: ‘It consists of the father, mother, and unwed children, as well as the wedded sons and their wives and children, unwed paternal aunts, and sometimes even unwed paternal uncles. In short, this unit is composed of blood relatives plus women who were brought into the kinship through marriage. Large as it may be, this unit tends to occupy one dwelling or a compound of dwellings built close together or often attached to one another’ (Lutfiyya 1966:142-143). It was an economic as well as a social unit and governed by the grandfather or the eldest male. The joint family normally dissolved upon the death of the grandfather. The land, which until then had been held by the grandfather, was divided among the heirs and the male children separately, each to become the nucleus of a new *za‘ila* (Stager 1985:18-20).

<sup>382</sup> About 50 percent of the population of Israel (in the Iron Age I) lived in rural areas, in small villages or hamlets (Gibson 2007:471) as opposed to the isolated family farms of the Iron Age II (Zertal 2001:42-43). The farmers ‘established fields and grew their crops and orchards’ around the vicinity of their villages (Gibson 2007:471-472).

<sup>383</sup> Faust bases the family structure in Iron II on an analysis of the houses occupied by families in villages and urban areas in that period. He found that many researchers concluded the four-room house to have been

in Ophrah of the Abiezrites (Jdg 8:32) presents textual example of ‘the frequent identity between the settlement and the *mišpāhā*’. When people died in the Old Testament they were said to be gathered unto their people/fathers or kin (Jdg 2:10; Nu 20:24; Gn 35:28; 49:29; Brett 2016:97). This tacitly recognised their affiliation with the land as tribal and ancestral (Brett 2016:97). The *mišpāhā* ‘was the basis for the village society’ (Borowski 2003:21; cf Faust 2003:29-31) for as Faust (2000:29-31) comments, the *mišpāhā* often created and comprised the settlement. The proto-Israelites recognised themselves as a people to whom certain territories exclusively belonged (Lau 2011:33-34). The land was thus tied to them by their blood relationships they shared in the kinship groups (Lau 2011:33-34.) The Samaria ostraca is evidence of this type of ‘kinship unit’ (Faust 2000:31). Growing up in a rural area such as a village or farm in which households functioned autonomously, an older girl was rapidly immersed in tasks related to existing and surviving off the farmland (Shafer-Elliott 2014b:120). Large-scale archaeological excavations of domestic architecture in Iron Age I settlements attest to the independent political, social and economic behaviour of early households in place of a centralised centre of political authority. These findings converge with the writings in the Book of Judges (Meyers 1988:140, 143).

#### 5.4.3.1 *The value of children*

King and Stager (2001:41) describe the Israelite society as ‘pronatalist’, taking seriously YHWH’s commandment in Genesis 1:28. Subsequently, ‘birth control, abortion and infanticide ... may ... have been considered contrary’ to God’s law (King & Stager 2001:41). Garroway (2012:95-114) notes that in antiquity the word ‘child’ implied membership in a specific communal group. Accordingly, the phases of life that constituted ‘childhood’, rather than classified by chronological age, were classified by age groupings

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inhabited by the nuclear family based on the archaeological finds at Tell Beersheba, Tell Beit Mirsim, Tell en-Nasbeh, Tell el-Far’ah (N), Tel Hazor and other areas. However, archaeological finds in rural areas such as Khirbet Jemein, Wadi Zimra and Khirbet er-Ras have led other archaeologists to propose that the four-room house was occupied by an extended family of three or four generations (Shiloh 1970:180-190; Broshi & Gophna 1984; Stager 1985; Dar 1986a; Faust 2000:19 citing Maitlis 1989). Family size and occupation might not have varied from Iron Age I to the Iron Age II, according to the findings of Dar (1986a) and Maitlis (1989). Therefore, it is probably that the Iron Age I village was inhabited by the extended family.



(Garroway 2012:95; cf Derevenski 1994:2).<sup>384</sup> In an agrarian society, children were important to the survival of a family. In my opinion, therefore, the age categories of children may also have been related to labour; in other words, the age at which a child could perform a necessary task effectively and presumably without adult supervision (cf Berquist 2002:117).

Children were considered the property of the fathers (Haviland 1996:234) who may have held the power of life and death over them (Pressler 1993:18). Pressler (1993:19), however, states that there is no evidence for the power of life and death held by a father over his children in the monarchical period, and therefore it might have been the same situation in Iron Age I. The fate of Jephthah's daughter was probably the result of the influence of the Canaanite religion on that of the people of Israel (Philibert 2005:115; Smoak 2008:1-26; cf Howard 2007:135). Children could be sold into slavery in times of economic need or be given as surety (cf Gn 42:37; 2 Ki 4:1; Pr 19:18).

In a household undergoing a financial crisis, daughters could be sold as wives or concubines by their fathers (cf Ex 21:7-11; McKenzie 1995:550). Ryken et al (2000d:3222) state that all young women were 'particularly vulnerable' and being non-autonomous 'every young woman was seen as a potential wife or maidservant'. Accordingly, I cannot say that difficulties did not occur between family members in the pre-monarchic period. Analogues can be found in the ancient Egyptian 'ritual against domestic quarrels' (cf Pritchard 1969:350-351) and Judges 17:1-2 for instance. These family quarrels could possible lead to the oppression of women. In addition, there were times that women were abused in the pre-monarchic period, as mentioned above. In the Book of Judges, the abuse of male power over women indicates the inequality that existed at times between the two genders, and particularly in the time periods after Iron I with adverse consequences for women regarding societal attitudes about them and their roles (cf Grabowski 2003:98).

This, however, as mentioned before, was not what YHWH envisioned for His people under His Kingship rule. Kruger (2007:151-175) describes the antiquity of perceptions of power, citing as examples from ancient Mesopotamia and the Babylonian era myth perceptions of otherness with which a different culture or religion or gender was

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<sup>384</sup> Garroway (2012:95-114) provides a more detailed discussion of the terms 'child' and 'childhood' and the perception of children in ancient Israel.

viewed in the ancient Near East. These ideologies were constructed around power where the 'other' is less powerful and to be feared and subjected (2007:151-153). Accordingly, the otherness with which men perceived women in pre-monarchic Israel could have led to their abuse and maltreatment at times. McKay (2009:28-41) also discusses the interactions between certain family members in ancient Israel (cf Matthews 2009:16-27). Consequently, in a household in need of money, the women of the household might have been seen as a means to benefit financially. However, this would have been against covenantal principles. In addition, women might not have been as oppressed and powerless as is held by Ryken et al (2000d:3222).

The Book of Judges presents an image of young women that might be the opposite of the traditionally held ideas of the perpetually powerless woman in the Old Testament. The daughter of Jephthah, for example, however doomed, displayed independent action and thought in Judges 11:36-38. Albeit married, Achsah also behaved independently of her husband (Jdg 1:14-15). The woman of Thebez, whose marital status is unknown, showed autonomous behaviour (Jdg 8:54). The young girls of Shiloh exercised their sacred autonomy by dancing on their own in a field near the vineyard (Jdg 21:21, 23). In my opinion, given the spirit of the times (cf Jdg 17:6; 21:25), it was most probably in cases of household impoverishment that young women were denied their independence and rights.

The narratives of Judges, however, do also represent the dichotomy in which daughters of households could be treated. In Judges 15:2 and 19:24 the reader is confronted with the abuse of parental power over daughters (Ryken et al 2000d:3222).

In Judges 15:2 the dishonourable behaviour of Samson's father-in-law stands in stark contrast to the respect and kindness Caleb (a Kenizzite) showed his daughter. Not only did Samson's father-in-law (a Philistine) apparently misappropriate his daughter's dowry – there is no mention of him returning the dowry in Judges 15:2 – but he had without consent re-arranged the marital status of his daughter to Samson (Ryken et al 2000d:3222). The father-in-law wished to involve Samson in an unlawful marriage to his younger daughter. However, the law in Leviticus 18:18 prohibited this type of marriage amongst the proto-Israelites (Ryken et al 2000d:3222). It was put in place to protect Israelite women from the same mistreatment the Philistine daughter suffered at the hands of her father

(Ryken et al 2000d:3222). The father evidently desired to appease Samson's anger and at the same time satisfy his greed for a second dowry.

Mesopotamian law regarding marriage required a marriage contract and a document of divorce (Mckenzie 1995:550). There is no reason to think that Canaanite and Israelite law (Dt 24:1) would have been different (Mckenzie 1995:550). Apparently, the Philistine father of Samson's wife, out of fear and greed, was exerting an unlawful ownership and authority over his daughter(s) that were contrary to the cultural paradigm of that period in the Book of Judges (Ryken et al 2000d:3222).

Similarly, in Judges 19:24 the father offering up his daughter and the concubine of the Levite to the wickedness of the Benjamites was acting against the law and societal acceptance (cf Jdg 19:30). The willingness of the father to allow harm to come to his daughter might be an indication of one man's view of the low social status of women (Barnes 1870e; cf Reis 2008:133). This may indicate the deterioration of patrilocal actions by the man in the era when 'every man did as they saw fit' (Bal 1988:90; Reis 2008:13). It may also be a sign of his eagerness not to break the sacred laws of hospitality by letting the Benjamites harm his daughter and the concubine and not the Levite (Barnes 1870e; Reis 2005:125; Szpek 2007; Stone 2009a). Ultimately, the man had no justifiable reason. In my opinion, it was terror and cowardice on behalf of him and the Levite that led to the evil unfolding in Judges 19. He dehumanised his daughter and the concubine to the extent that they became objects to save the lives of the men. As mentioned before, this behaviour is in accordance with the moral decay and anarchy that was prevalent in the society as reflected in the Book of Judges and far apart from what YHWH had in mind for His people under theocracy (Reis 2008:130).

Ryken et al (2000e:193-194) note that 'perhaps the daughter of Jerusalem from Solomon's Song' in Canticles 8:4 'summarize the daughter image best'. They suggest that 'whether literal or allegorical in its interpretation, this passage demonstrates the image of a daughter who receives great blessing and is responsible to let her actions preserve the honor of that blessing'. Doubtlessly, this image is appropriate to the daughter of Jephthah<sup>385</sup> and all the other women, named and unnamed, in the Book of Judges.

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<sup>385</sup> Judges 11:35 speaks of the love of a father as he mourns for his daughter. Jephthah had made a vow to YHWH that if military victory was granted to him, he would sacrifice to YHWH whoever came out of his

#### 5.4.3.2 *Economic contributions by children*

Gruber (1989:61-83) states that ‘a child in Judah in 734 BCE was commonly nursed until age two or three’. Berquist (2002:117) reports that infants received care from their mothers, nurses, fathers and older siblings.<sup>386</sup> Presumably, at the age of three when they had been weaned it was possible for young children to start performing household tasks – those tasks light enough and within their capabilities and performed, naturally, under the watchful eye of their parents or older siblings (Berquist 2002:117; Meyers 1997a:27).

Beginning at age five or six, substantial contributions were made to the household economy by children (Meyers 1997a:27; Berquist 2002:117; Adams 2014:61). At this age both girls and boys helped their mother with several domestic chores until the boys were old enough to assist their fathers with the farming and hunting (Berquist 2002:117). Berquist (2002:117) describes the ‘economic realities of ancient Israel’s subsistence farming’ as such that it required the contribution of ‘even young children’ in any way they could to assist in the economic survival of the family.

Tasks consisted of gathering wood and other supplies of fuel for the household, collecting vegetables and watering the vegetable patches, helping with the preparation of food, and looking after babies and small children (Meyers 1997a:27).

Tasks grew more arduous as children grew older and at the age of thirteen children’s chores included the upkeep of crops, tending to the farm animals and the supervision of servants if the head of the household was unavailable (Meyers 1997a:27; Borowski 2003:115; Adams 2014:61). At this age, children, with same-sex adults (boys with their fathers, brothers, uncles, and girls with their mothers, sisters, aunts), performed

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house on his return home (see 2.4.1.1 e). His daughter was the one to meet her father and his response of agony and tearing his clothes as a sign of mourning was indicative of his daughter as the unanticipated object of sacrifice (Exum 1993:18). She was an ‘only child’, a term of special endearment (Gn 22:2, 12, 16; Jr 6:26; Zch 12:10) that is used to emphasise Jephthah’s love for his daughter (Barnes 1870d). As mentioned before (see 2.4.1.1 e) the story of Jephthah’s daughter cannot simply be the result of an abusive patriarchy (Bohmbach 2009). Instead it is symptomatic of the social disintegration and general mayhem in the Book of Judges. Her story reveals a deeply troubled society and the desperate need for its transformation. The daughter’s response to her father’s vow reveals the heroism needed for societal change, compared to the fear and cowardice of the men in Judges 15:2; 19:24 that allow the status quo to remain unchanged (see 2.4.1.1 e).

<sup>386</sup> Malnutrition among infants appears to have been more common among those in rural areas than in the cities. However, food and water contamination that led to diseases in people and plagues caused by rodent and insect infestations may have been more common in cities because of the high concentration of inhabitants. Subsequently, infant mortality may have been higher in urban areas than in rural places. Infant mortality may also account for Jephthah’s daughter being his only child (cf Jdg 11:34).

gender-related tasks that could go beyond nine hours per day. Grinding of flour for the baking of bread, weaving, taking care of the vegetable gardens, and food preparation might have filled the long working hours in a day for young girls (Meyers 1997a:27).

The importance of children in the household emphasises the fact that women's production and reproduction capabilities became inseparable entities in the early Israelite community that enabled the survival of the family on their farms.<sup>387</sup> Such was this necessity that Meyers describes procreation in early Israel as 'part of a context of supplying labor and maintaining land tenure' (Meyers 1997a:27-29).

## 5.5 THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN

Proverbs 1:8, 6:20, 31:1-9 and 31:10-31 attest to women's role in the instruction of their children (cf Jdg 14:3). Education on early (pre-monarchic) Israelite farms was fundamental to the economic function of the household (Meyers 1997a:30). Though informal, the education of children was taken quite seriously and as evident in texts such as Proverbs 4:1-4, 22:6 and Deuteronomy 11:19 started at a very young age.<sup>388</sup> The transmission of knowledge probably started as soon as a child was weaned and capable of performing household tasks. Thus, mothers were the first teachers of their children (Marsman 2003:202-203).

The principal teachers, in addition to the parents, were also the elder people such as the grandparents in the tribe or family who focused their teachings on the children (American Bible Society 2016. Education in Ancient Israel. American Bible Society Resources. From: <http://bibleresources.americanbible.org/resource/education-in-ancient-israel>). The communication and training of younger members in the family to acquire knowledge, skills and methods to sustain their agrarian lifestyle probably formed a perpetual part of the interactions between the older and younger generations in a family (Meyers 1997a:30). Nocturnal campfires, wells, courtyards and other places where tasks

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<sup>387</sup> Meyers (1997:28) notes that the 'compatibility of subsistence tasks and maternity in an agrarian regime' meant that childbearing and motherhood were interconnected with women's domestic and agricultural tasks in ancient Israel and not 'distinct or competing categories of female existence as they are in the industrialized world'.

<sup>388</sup> Though these texts refer to the religious training and teaching of children, the ancient Israelites would have applied the same attitude with which they approached the transmission of their religious values and traditions to the passing of knowledge that related to their economic survival (Yarbrough 1993:45). Yarbrough (1993:44) notes that it is hard to conclude the age at which children were first taught.

were carried out probably served as ‘classrooms’ for children where training and the passing of knowledge occurred through conversations, storytelling and practical application of knowledge (cf American Bible Society 2016. Education in Ancient Israel. From: <http://bibleresources.americanbible.org/resource/education-in-ancient-israel>).<sup>389</sup>

As village leaders, the role of wise women also probably comprised the education of people, possibly including young adults. This type of ‘wisdom’ education<sup>390</sup> was probably in the form of proverbs, parables and riddles (cf Pr 1:5-6; Camp 1981:19). In this way, particularly by means of sayings and proverbs, people were taught to be prudent themselves and uphold the values of the Israelites (Camp 1981:19).

Women as the educators of their children were most probably adhering to Deuteronomy 11:18-19. Apparently, the mothers of Samson (Jdg 14-16) and Micah (Jdg 17) did not achieve much success in the instruction or ‘wisdom’ education of their sons. This passage (Dt 11:18-19) indicates the teaching of children by both parents (Camp 1981:24-25). Teaching of children, according to Deuteronomy 11:18, occurred by means of verbal and written communication. It might therefore be possible that analogous to the large-scale and ‘significant educational investment in women’ in the ancient Near East, Israelite women too might have received sufficient education to act as teachers in the lives of their children (Meier 1991:442).

While perhaps not educated to the level of the female scribes in the Old Babylonian city of Sippar (Zimbar in Sumerian) perhaps or female scribes elsewhere,<sup>391</sup> many if not all Israelite women probably received a rudimentary education (Meier 1991:442). Their education would have included reading and writing. It may therefore be safely assumed that the young man in Judges 8:14 who wrote down the names of the 77 elders of Succoth may have received his earliest education, which included reading and writing, from his mother or other older women in his household. That women educated older students is evident from Proverbs 1-9. Govier states that Proverbs 1-9 could also mean that women possessed literacy skills, but this is unfortunately unconfirmed by archaeology thus far

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<sup>389</sup> Yarbrough (1993:42) includes festivals as important times for children to learn through ‘instruction and observation’.

<sup>390</sup> I use this term to refer to the teaching of morality and encouraging ethical behaviour in young adults and children in households as part of their education in general. Camp (1981:25) refers to this form of instruction as ‘the use of wisdom’s admonition-form in the educational setting’.

<sup>391</sup> These female scribes are referred to in an oil quota catalogue from the Mari palace (Meier 1991:442).

(Govier 2016).

An examination of inscriptions written on 2600-year-old pottery shards found at the fortress of Tel Arad in the Negev desert have led researchers to believe that literacy in the 7th century BC kingdom of Judah was more prevalent than previously held. Analyses of 16 of the ostraca have revealed that 6 different people undertook to write what are described as to-do lists. The fact that the young man in Judges 8:14 could write 77 different names also reveals much about literacy in pre-monarchic settlement in the Book of Judges (Govier 2016).

Naturally, the arduous and time-consuming tasks that were a part of the agrarian life of the Israelite women during the period of the Judges left little room for women to function as scribes and official messengers in their community. Yet, the informal women's network that sprang up from women's communal activities in their courtyards and houses might have provided women with opportunities to act as scribes and messengers in an unofficial capacity. Important information was memorised and perhaps written down by the most adept women and passed on in the community. Teaching the young skills that were necessary to acquire in an agrarian lifestyle saw women undertaking the roles of teachers and trainers of their own and other children in the community.

### **5.5.1 Gender-specific education**

As they grew older, more gender-specific knowledge and skills were imparted to boys and girls (Meyers 1997a:30). Life on the farms of the proto-Israelites was intimately bound to the land and the environment. Each farm had a specific set of variations in the topography and ecology that were determined by the diverseness of the highland landscape. For this reason, the elder male members of the family were in possession of knowledge relating to the ecological factors specific to their farm (Meyers 1997a:30). Detailed knowledge regarding the type of soil, 'terrain, climate, tool types, crop choices and livestock management' that would enable 'the family to maximize its limited potential' was passed on to the older boys (Meyers 1997a:30).<sup>392</sup>

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<sup>392</sup> Meyers (1997a:30) notes that this was probably a good reason for the 'strong emphasis on land inalienability'.

For girls, the gender-specific education on the farms involved their training by the older female family members in the technical features pertaining to tending the gardens, the processing and preparation of food, textile manufacture and all other women's specific labour (see Meyers 1997a:30). Women's labour, such as cooking or weaving, while less reliant on environmental factors and information (cf 5.6; 5.7 and 5.8) because they could be done inside or outside the house (in the courtyard, for example), did involve a greater amount of technological proficiency than that of male tasks in the outdoors (Meyers 1997a:30). Grandmothers, mothers and aunts had the responsibility of passing on their (secret) knowledge and expertise<sup>393</sup> in cooking and weaving and other tasks to the younger girls as they went about performing their domestic duties. The older female relatives probably impressed upon younger girls the importance of their place and function in the household to ensure its economic viability and the continuation of the pre-monarchic Israelite traditions in addition to the keeping of their religious laws.

### 5.5.2 Education and parental control

The responsibility of parents toward their offspring and the duties of children toward their parents necessitated a considerable amount of parental authority (Yarbrough 1993:41). Discipline was incorporated into raising children to discourage wayward behaviour (cf Pr 22:15) and it appears that fathers had to teach their sons a trade (cf Ec 9:9). To ensure that the next generation of young family members would abide by the Israelite religion and function as a stable and trustworthy body of workers on the farms, firm parental guidance and authority were key elements in carrying out parental obligations. Meyers states that strict parental authority was the result of 'diverse and technical nature of the various subsistence activities' that could not accommodate any disruptions by delinquent offspring (Meyers 1997a:31). Meyers (1997a:31) further notes that the distribution of property and resources and the allocation of farm and domestic duties as well as procedures concerning marriage agreements had to be put into effect under 'quasi-legal parental authority'. Any

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<sup>393</sup> The responsibility of equipping younger (female) family members with the know-how and skills necessary to ensure the economic survival of the household and the continuation of the religion had to do with *hesed*. McKim (1986:19) describes the term *hesed* as designating 'behavior that fulfilled obligations to those in the family or tribal relationship'. 'Women would have assumed an attitude of loyalty to their obligation to reproduce and teach and train their children that went above the normal in the pre-monarchic period because of the peculiarities of that period' (Mckim 1986:19-20).



disagreements had to be quelled immediately within the family so that normal economic functions would not be disrupted. This could explain why the parents of Samson's initial reluctance gave way to acceptance of his marriage (cf Jdg 14:5). It might also explain why the mother of Micah was eager to forgive her son for the theft of her money (Jdg 17:2).

For these reasons, the roles of educators and the management of the children and their labour, assumed by parents, seemed to have been determined predominantly by the household economy (Meyers 1997a:31). Judges 8:13-17 indicate that reading and writing skills were taught to children or certain young men at least. However, whether they were skills taught on the farms of the simpler, less wealthy people who were challenged daily as they were by the elements of nature and topography is debatable in my opinion. In addition, if reading and writing were taught, it was done within the context of increasing and ensuring the economic production of the household, of which the Gezer Calendar may be evidence (Cornill 1902:1-23).

#### *5.5.2.1 Education and a woman's autonomy*

The daughter of Jephthah and her circle of friends in Judges 11:36 may be indicative of an (informal) women's network. The girls in this group probably received their education and training related to women's specific tasks from the older women (mothers, grandmothers, sisters and aunts) who were already proficient in these tasks in their families or community (cf 5.5; 5.5.1). Judges 11:34 and 21:23 reveal that the girls also received training in dancing and playing musical instruments. These women's specific roles, tasks, knowledge, talents and expertise altogether provided women with a foundation for independent thinking and behaviour as evident throughout the Book of Judges (cf Jdg 1:14-15; 4-5; 9:53; 13; 14:2-4; 16; 17:1-5). Apparently, the women's independence and authority began while being taught and trained by their mothers in their households. The time groups of women spent working in the courtyards, grinding grain for multiple hours, may have been intermixed with educating and instructing younger girls (Ebeling 2010:50).

There are many instances in the Old Testament of a woman who goes out to meet a man for whatever reason and without opposition from the males who receive them (cf Jdg 1:14; 11:34; Ruth 3:3-4; Job 1:4; Es 5:1; Can 3:1-2; Gn 24:57-61). In my opinion, the freedom of movement shown by the women in the Book of Judges is indicative of the

autonomy that was prevalent in the society of the early Israel and might have been due to their education of independence as mentioned above and an acceptable part of women's lives and what was meant for the chosen people under YHWH's Kingship.

#### a. Achsah

The character of Achsah is depicted as typical of the assertive, autonomous and active roles numerous female personalities such as Deborah, Jael<sup>394</sup> and the unnamed women of Thebez undertook in the public domain (Constable 2012b). As a sign of her independence and disregard for tradition and customary behaviour, Achsah approached her father on a donkey, later regarded to be an unclean animal (cf 2.5.1 and 6.3.2 a; Jordan 1985xiii).

Achsah, according to Douglas and Tenney (2011a), was 'out riding one day' to visit her father Caleb. She required in addition to her dowry, land with springs, water being very necessary in the semi-arid Hill Country (Cundall & Morris 2011a; cf Gunn 2005:17). Constable (2012b) remarks that the importance of Achsah in the Book of Judges foresees the key position women would take up in the ensuing narratives. Consequently, it is most likely that Achsah's future role as an important woman with status and with an acute sense as a negotiator and manager of her property stemmed from the education she had received from her childhood teachers (see above). Accordingly, it can be imagined that the older women in her household would have instilled in her the type of independence, intelligence and courage that would be the foundation of her role and status in her community.

#### b. Deborah

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<sup>394</sup> In narrating the story of Jael, the Kenite, the writer recounts her actions without 'surprise or negative judgment' (Hackett 1985:23). Much has been said of her deception of Sisera and her killing him, and consequently Jael's violation of traditional eastern hospitality that ensured protection to one's visitors (Coffman 1999b; Garcia-Alfonso 2010:109; Bodner 2016). Requesting Sisera twice to turn into her (Jdg 4:18), the tired and unsuspecting warrior entered and asked for water. In a motherly fashion, Jael gave him milk and then covered Sisera with a rug (Jdg 4:19). It was while he was asleep that Jael struck and killed Sisera (Jdg 4:21; Niditch 2001:181). The account of Jael's slaying of Sisera in Judges 4:21 differs in Judges 5:26-27. Hirsch and Price (1906) comments, that the two stories do not conflict but complement each other. Whatever her motives for killing Sisera<sup>394</sup> (Coffman 1999b), Jael is declared a heroine and there is no criticism of her deception (Carter 2002:119; cf Eves 2002:133-134). Garcia-Alfonso (2010:109) and Carter (2002:119) view Jael's deception as an act of preservation of her tribe and the Israelites. Hirsch and Price (1906) note that Jael's behaviour is in accordance with the ethics of her time. In her act of slaying Sisera, Jael fulfilled Deborah's prophecy in Judges 4:9 when she predicted that the honour of killing Sisera would fall on a woman.

The notion that women in antiquity were confined to their houses is completely refuted by Deborah, ‘the divinely appointed deliverer and executive leader of the Israelites’ (Douglas & Tenney 2011f; cf Coffman 1999b).<sup>395</sup> Deborah is another example of a character in the Book of Judges that cannot be considered a weak personality or render a man associated with her as defeated or dominated (Kruger 2007:162). We may speculate that (similar to Achsah) this might have been a result of her education by the women in her household as it would have been allowed under YHWH’s covenantal rule. The women in her household

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<sup>395</sup> In this footnote, I will illustrate how freedom of movement by women and certain actions by some women indicated women’s autonomy in the pre-monarchic period that was in keeping with the ideal of gender equality under YHWH’s theocratic rule. It was shameful for a military man to be killed by a woman (cf Jdg 4:17-21; 9:53; 2 Sm 11:21; Frymer-Kensky 2004:20; Pett 2013b). Presumably physically strong and morally upright, men avoided inhabiting public and domestic places allocated to women. They also shunned any association with women’s specific instruments (Washington 2004:197). However, in the period of the Judges, it appears that men and women intermingled. Examples are found in Judges: Sisera entering Jael’s tent (4:18), Barak meeting with Deborah (Jdg 4:6), and Samson visiting the houses of the various women (Jdg 14:7; 16:1, 4).

The Book of Judges emphatically mentions the strength of these men (Jdg 4:3, 6; 9:3-4, 17, 34; 14:6, 19; 16:3). The proto-Israelite women too appear assertive and autonomous (Constable 2012b). The authors/editors of the Book of Judges relate the manner and instruments used to kill the men in Judges 4:17-21 and in 9:53 the capture of Samson (Jdg 16). In my opinion, it was the idea of being killed by a woman as a non-military person – that was abhorrent to these military leaders. Also, being killed outside the battlefield in the case of Sisera and by non-military instruments – in the case of Abimelech a grindstone and in the case of Sisera a tent peg and hammer – were considered dishonourable. It was not their association with the women and their equipment that was shameful, but that the women and their tools were non-military.

This could have been the case particularly in the period of the Book of Judges when warfare played such a great role in the lives of the communities, tribes and nations (cf 2.2; Cundall & Morris 2011:200; 203; cf Niditch 2001:176). Samson, while still physically strong, did not have any misgivings against having his hair woven into Delilah’s loom or falling asleep on her lap (Jdg 16:19). Barak did not hesitate in requiring Deborah’s presence during the war with Sisera. I think that neither Samson nor Barak perceived the women in their company as weak.

These men may be more typical of men’s attitudes towards women in general in the Book of Judges. These incidents may be indicative of the ideal YHWH had for men and women under His Kingship rule. Presumably, men visited unrelated women in their homes under divine order (Elisha in 2 Ki 4:32), for leisure (Samson in Jdg 16), or in times of military duress (cf Jdg 4:17; cf Jos 2:1). Contrary to Sisera who entered Jael’s tent to conceal himself from the pursuing Israelites (Jdg 4:17), Samson entered Delilah’s house for intimate purposes (Jdg 16). It is remarkable that it was Jael who extended hospitality to Sisera and thereby the customary assurance of protection and not her husband, Heber (Cundall & Morris 2011:192; cf Barnes 1870b; Coffman 1999b and Poole 2016).

According to Clarke (1832b) and Gill (2012c), Sisera went inside her tent for protection, thinking that he would be safe for the Israelites would not enter the tent of a woman uninvited. Sisera’s request that she stands at the tent entrance and point anyone away from the tent (Jdg 4:20; Frymer-Kensky 2009b) refutes the idea that might imply the Israelites were unable to go inside the tent. Apparently, the society in the pre-monarchic period accepted men and women’s decisions to move about as they chose without criticism, as evident in the Book of Judges. The idea that men and women were equally independent to go about as they did is also symbolic of the gender stratification that was much less prominent in the pre-monarchic community. Meyers (1997:122, in Miller 2005:8) furthermore contends that gender stratification was less pronounced whenever women made significant contributions to the essential needs of an agrarian community.

might have trained and prepared Deborah<sup>396</sup> by giving her tasks that would teach her leadership skills. Consequently, this type of leadership training would have allowed Deborah to take up the roles of judge, lawgiver and prophetess.

The authority of Deborah was acknowledged among the Israelites prior to the events in Judges 4 and seems to ‘upstage’ the command of Barak (Coffman 1999b). Barak, as the prototypical warrior, was the epitome of physical strength, dexterity and mettle and a hero of Israel (Ryken et al 2000l:76-80; Constable 2012c). Yet this brave warrior, esteemed for his leadership skills and ‘personalized weapons’ (Ryken et al 2000l:76-80), played a ‘secondary part’ to the ‘awe-inspiring, exceptional and talented Deborah’ (Cundall & Morris 2011:180). Did she inherit these talents and skills from her education by the older women in her family?

## 5.6 FOOD PRODUCTION

### 5.6.1 The farm

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<sup>396</sup> Despite God’s promise of victory, Barak required Deborah to accompany him and his troops to the battlefield (Constable 2012c; cf Clarke 1832b and Brensinger 1999:67). Deborah, leader of Israel, summoned Barak, the military leader from Kedesh in Naphtali, to make war against Jabin, the Canaanite oppressor of the Israelites (Jdg 4:2-3; Fretz 1996b:23; Lowery 1996:608). Barak was called from the north by Deborah, who was in Ephraim, to go to war against a federation of forces under the command of Sisera (Lowery 1996:608). Deborah had communed a divine directive to Barak. Barak, however, gave Deborah an ultimatum: ‘If you go with me, I will go; but if you don’t go with me, I won’t go’ (Jdg 4:8).

Deborah cooperated. Barak realised his need of Deborah’s skills as an advisor and her authority to assist him in mobilising the Israelite tribes and keep them unified (Benson 1857c). Deborah might have been more accepting of the situation given the times they were living in (see Niditch 2008:65). Still, certain gender-specific tasks were clearly delineated in that tumultuous age ([women did not go to war] see Webb 2012:628). Deborah understood that her message was difficult for Barak and had created conflict in him. He was more inclined to trust Deborah’s relationship with God than his own association with the Deity (Guzik 2003b; cf Coffman 1999b).

Barak was forced to admit that he lacked the confidence to rally the fighting men among the Israelites in addition to his lack of faith in God and his own ineptitude (Cundall & Morris 2011:185-186; cf McCann 2011:52). Deborah was aware that Barak was at risk of losing his reputation as a heroic military commander (Grintz 2007:129). Going to war and saving the Israelites from the enemy was a task ascribed to men (Webb 2012:628; McCann 2011:52). Deborah predicted that Barak would forfeit the possibility of personally shaming his adversary (Jdg 4:9; Webb 2012:629), for that honour would go to a woman (Lowery 1996:608). The prediction was an admonition against Barak’s insistence on her presence at the battlefield (Martin 1975:57).

Victory over Sisera would go to an unlikely hero – a woman – and enhance the reputation of Deborah as a warrior (Niditch 2008:65). Nevertheless, they were faced with a desperate situation that required them to work together in harmony to secure the victory they needed over Sisera. Deborah’s presence was the motivational force behind the Israelite soldiers that inspired them to vanquish the army of Sisera. Cundall and Morris (2011:71) reports on the archaeological evidence discovered in Megiddo that supports and dates Deborah’s victory over the Canaanites to 1125 BC.

Agriculture was the central axis of the household economy that existed on farms<sup>397</sup> in the highland of Samaria, Judah, Galilee and Gilead. In addition, Israelite farmers were also involved in raising sheep and cattle as auxiliary farming activities (Ebeling 2010:33; Gottwald 2012).<sup>398</sup> In Judges (1:14-5) Achsah received a farm from her father, given to her as a dowry (see 5.5.2.1 a). Farms were between 10-16 hectares in size and contingent on the available water resources and the nature of the soil (Meyers 1997a:10-11; Thompson 1999; Gibson 2007:476-479), between 10-20 percent of the land was worked (Dar 1986:4-6; Deist 2000:189). This was primarily why Achsah required land with water from her father (Jdg 1:14-15). The cultivation of grains (primarily wheat and some barley), olives for oil and food, and grapes for wine and fruit constituted the major contributions to the household economy. Therefore, it is possible that given an adequate water supply on her farmland, Achsah and her family would have cultivated wheat, olives and grapes (see MacDonald 2008:25). In addition, the household of Achsah would probably have

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<sup>397</sup> Farms were communal property and could not be owned by an individual. This is in contrast with the 'private ownership' of most of the agricultural land in Iron Age II (Gibson 2007:472). The 'common land' (Jos 21:12; Neh 5:3) was allocated to family units for farming by casting the lot and farm borders were usually permanently fixed by boundary stones. Farmers could not increase their land sizes by moving these boundary markers (Dt 19:14; 27:17). Deist (2000:144), arguing against the belief by some that boundary markers were not utilised in the Iron Age, comments that boundary markers became the norm sometime in that period. The land they shared and which was passed on from one generation to the next and that could not be sold forged a family's unity.

Gibson reports that the 'family inheritance was referred to as the *nahalah* or *ahuzah*' (Gibson 2007:472). As it was a family's heritage, the land was also its sustenance. But the land also belonged to the village and was there for the nourishment of the entire community. Deist mentions that impoverished villagers were permitted to gather the ears of grain *inter alia* that were left over in the 'process of cutting, gathering and binding' (Dar 1986b:4; Deist 2000:143-146; cf also Gibson 2007:474-476 for a more informative discussion of farm demarcations).

Excavations in a cave at Ramat Ben Shemesh, believed to be a cellar associated with a farming compound, led to the discovery of three ostraca. These ostraca reveal how matters regarding the dimensions of fields as well as how the produce of fields belonging to several people were handled. The ostraca do not relate the kind of agricultural activities performed in the fields, but they may have been used for cereal farming (Milevski 2005:24). Meyers describes the agricultural practices on these farms as intensive, permanent and diversified (Meyers 1997a:3). Due to water constraints, dry farming was mostly in practice. Agriculture in the Negev was entirely reliant on run-off irrigation. Consequently, some areas were suitable for the growing of grain crops and other parts for fruits and vegetables, with still other areas appropriate for animal husbandry (Thompson 1999; Gibson 2007:471).

<sup>398</sup> In support of the evidence that points to auxiliary farming practices, Gottwald cites Exodus 20:24 and 23:19 as well as the depictions of tribal existence in Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33 (Gottwald 2012). Rosen (1994:347-349) holds that cereals were the basis of agricultural practices in Iron I villages as in 'Izbet Šartah and herding practices in other such as Giloh. Zertal reports that the village economy at Tel Qiri was found to be based on animal husbandry, evidenced by the bones of sheep, cattle and other domesticated animals found at the site (Davids 1987; Zertal 2001:48). Deist (2000:143) also notes that (in the pre-monarchic period) certain farmers were mostly involved in crop cultivation while others raised animals, but that by the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC 'agriculture and animal breeding were joint ventures'.

cultivated vegetables such as cucumbers, onions, leeks, watermelons and garlic (see MacDonald 2008:25). Plants used as herbs and spices were also grown as they would have been important to the household for food preparation and cooking purposes (MacDonald 2008:25).<sup>399</sup> Lentils, flax,<sup>400</sup> fava beans and chickpeas were part of the legumes grown and used in the food preparations by the women of the household and were consumed by their family members (MacDonald 2008:26-27; cf Talmon 1963:182). Vital clues about food preparation that might have been done by the women in Achsah's household are provided by epigraphic remains; for example, the ostraca found at Samaria and Arad (Macdonald 2008:10-15).

Other garden and orchard yields that augmented a family's diet and were utilised by women in the food preparation process included nuts, seeds, figs, dates, watermelon and pomegranates (Meyers 1998:253; 1997:11; King & Stager 2001:93-94; Borowski 2003:63-72). Archaeological finds uncovered at Ramat Ben Shemesh and dated to the end of the Judahite Monarchy show that the complex was part of an agricultural centre that cultivated a combination of grains, vineyards and olive trees (Milevski 2005:24). The cultivation of these crops demonstrates the 'tripartite strategy' of agriculture adopted by farmers that involved the widespread growing of wheat or barley,<sup>401</sup> olives and grapevines (Meyers 1997a:11).<sup>402</sup>

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<sup>399</sup> MacDonald describes vegetables as 'poorly regarded in ancient Israel' where 'in the Israelite hierarchy of foods, meat is at the top and vegetables are near the bottom' (MacDonald 2008:25). Among the plants cultivated as herbs (leaves) and spices (seeds) and used as flavourings for food and at times medicine mentioned in the Bible are aloes, balm, bitter herbs, caraway, cassia, cinnamon, coriander, cumin, henna, myrrh, saffron and salt herbs (Rosengarten 1969:23-96; Manser [ed] 2009b provide a history of spices in Mesopotamia as well as documentation of spices in other parts of the ancient world; cf Hirschfeld 2007:21-40 for uses of the rose and balsam and Dasgupta 2014:35 who mentions the archaeological discovery of burnt cloves on kitchen floors at Terqa in Syria dated to 1700 BC).

<sup>400</sup> Talmon (1963:182) believes flax was cultivated on a grand scale only towards the middle of the first millennium BC in ancient Israel. Before this era, the importance of wool took precedence over flax.

<sup>401</sup> Cereals were among the first plants to be domesticated and their cultivation preceded that of fruit trees. Eikorn, emmer, bread wheat and hard wheat numbered among the different kinds of wheat grown. Wheat was believed to be part of the diet of the well-heeled, while barley was the food of the poor and used as animal feed (King & Stager 2001:94-95). Barley, though second-rate to wheat, had a few distinct advantages over wheat. It was abundant and harvested two weeks prior to the wheat harvest in April and May. Its maturation rate was more rapid and it was adaptable to different variations in the weather (Borowski 1987:7).

<sup>402</sup> Judges 15:5 shows the threefold practice of grain, vineyard and olive trees cultivation by the Philistines. Evidence for the various crops cultivated is provided by Macalister's (1912b:22-23) excavations of Gezer where he records the discovery of the 'large stores of charred grain and fruits' that grant insight into the 'cereals in use in the ancient city' of Gezer. Among the cereals and fruit found to be a part of the diet of the Gezerites were 'wheat, barley, oats ... two species of vetch, beans ... figs, grapes, pomegranates, and olives'. Also found were the 'scorched remains of pistachio nuts ... acorns, terebinth and apricot seeds'. Interestingly,

Sickle blades and grinding stones unearthed at Tell Qiri reveal a village economy based on growing wheat and barley. Similarly, at Tell Qiri cup marks, olive stones and oil presses (see Figure 5.9) indicate the cultivation of olives, pomegranates, peas and vetch (Ben-Tor 1987:236-243; Lipschitz & Weisel 1987:252-257; Zertal 2001:48; Rosen et al 2006:141-142).



Figure 5.9 Oil press from Tell Qiri [8th century BC]  
(<http://0-www.baslibrary.org.oasis.unisa.ac.za/images/bsba060203400l.jpg>)

### 5.6.2 Women's farming duties

The difficult topography and the arid climate<sup>403</sup> required intense labour on farms. Very little technology<sup>404</sup> (Deist 2000:118) and the intensity of farm labour probably required women to 'perform certain regular productive tasks (on their farms and villages) that otherwise might have been relegated to males alone' ([insertion mine], Meyers 1988:56). Presumably, participation in these male-designated tasks resulted in women acquiring a certain type of authority associated with land management (Gn 1:28; Jdg 1:14-15; 13:9; cf Jdg 17:1-4). 1 Samuel 8:11-13 indicates that women may not have participated in 'field or

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wheat and barley, which were usually stored separately, were frequently found 'mixed together, apparently with intention'.

<sup>403</sup> Cf Meyers (1988:54; 1997:10-11); Deist (2000:125); King and Stager (2001:86-87).

<sup>404</sup> In the pre-monarchic tribal community, the lack of natural resources in the highlands meant that the Israelites were poor in inter alia iron-ore. They would eventually later gain access to the copper and iron ore sources in the south when they gained control of Edom (Orlinsky 1954:48-49). Consequently, the use of iron tools possibly assisted in the labour-intensive cutting of cisterns and land clearing. However, Meyers points out that there is no considerable increase in the quantity of iron tools in proportion to bronze implements in Iron Age I and Deist seems to agree that the technology of the early Israelites (probably due to their lack of access to iron resources) was less advanced (Meyers 1988:55; Deist 2000:118) than that of their neighbours. For example, iron sickle blades were only used during the Monarchy (Borowski 2003:59-61; Ebeling 2010:35). It appears that farmers used mainly sickle blades made of flint, as the lithic assemblage at Beer Resisim indicates (Rosen et al 2006:141-142).

plow agriculture', but they 'probably did contribute substantially to the hoeing and weeding and the planting and picking that vegetable gardens, orchards and vineyards required' (Meyers 1988:146; 1998:254; cf Jdg 13:9). Textual evidence for a woman's 'required' involvement in 'planting, weeding and harvesting activities' may be found in Judges 13:9. In this case the Angel appeared to Samson's mother 'while she was out in the field'. She might have been performing an agricultural chore which did not require her husband's assistance or presence and therefore may have been a woman's only task, possibly hoeing or weeding.<sup>405</sup> The word *sādeh*, translated as 'field' in Judges 5:18; 13:9 and 'fields' in Judges 9:27, signifies an open or cultivated/ploughed field (Old Testament lexical aids, NIV). The woman experienced a theophany twice while alone. I surmise she might have been working in the field on one or both occasions, which could possibly mean that she was undertaking a woman's specific agricultural task, perhaps weeding (cf Jdg 13:9; Meyers 1998:254).

#### 5.6.2.1 *Drawing water, weeding and gathering*

Other outdoor duties for pre-monarchic women included carrying large jugs filled with water drawn from a nearby spring or cistern on their heads to irrigate their vegetable plots (Lockyer 1967:19). Apart from delivering water by hand, these crops could also have been irrigated by conducting the water flow in channels from nearby water sources (Patch 1938a; cf Gibson 2007:481-482). The vital job of hauling water from wells to provide for the household needs was allocated to women<sup>406</sup> (Hyman 2006:180-189; 1 Sm 9:3-12) and thus it makes sense that women would have helped with the engineering and irrigation of the vegetable and herb patches as well as the vines and fruit trees. Such procedures required careful planning and organisation on behalf of the women and naturally consumed a good part of their time.

Women may have assisted in pruning the thorn hedges that served as the boundaries of the household's fruit plots (cf Jdg 9:15; Gibson 2007:473). To augment their food

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<sup>405</sup> The woman alone in the field may or may not have been involved in an agricultural task. She might have been praying because she was barren (cf Le Roux 2016).

<sup>406</sup> 'The task was even more important when the young woman was also a shepherdess responsible for watering her flock. The well was an important element in her life' (Hyman 2006:180-18; cf Gn 24:10-27; 29:1-11; Ex 2:15-19).



supplies, foliage plants, nuts, mushrooms, wild fruits, roots and tubers were gathered farther from the homestead in the forests extant in the north of ancient Israel. Perhaps this was a task for the younger and older non-parturient women who may have belonged to poorer families (MacDonald 2008:26).

#### *5.6.2.2 Fertilisation*

For the fertilisation of fields, women regularly collected the dung of cows, sheep and goats from their mangers and animal pens and assisted in spreading the manure on the fields. Gibson mentions the ‘frequent manuring of beds of cucumber and other vegetables’ documented in the Mishnah (Gibson 2007:480; Tepper 2007:42). Straw added to the dung was turned into flat shapes and together with the firewood<sup>407</sup> gathered from outside was used as fuel for the household fires (Lockyer 1967:19; Holladay 2009:66). Household and courtyard rubbish that included shards of pottery accumulated by the women were also used as fertiliser for the fields (Gibson 2007:480; Tepper 2007:42-43).<sup>408</sup>

#### **5.6.3 Cycles of fertility**

Drawing and carrying water as well as collecting dung patties frequently involved weighty loads for the women (Lockyer 1967:19). Amid their farming duties, women had to take care of the children. I believe that once she had her child, the mother of Samson’s tasks would have increased and included taking care of her infant son as well. Meyers recounts that since the cultivation of ‘fruit trees and vines, vegetables and herbs ... were adjacent to the living quarters’, it made taking care of the crops and children easier (Meyers 1998:254; Borowski 2003:135-138; Ebeling 2010:36).<sup>409</sup>

The participation of women in the mixed economic subsistence of farming and herding was no different from the lives of their female predecessors from the Intermediate Bronze Age (IBA) villages in the hills of north-eastern Samaria and the valley of Beth-

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<sup>407</sup> At Tell Beersheba the discovery of remnants of white broom (*Retama roetam*) near ovens and household courtyards points towards its use as firewood (Reich 1992:8).

<sup>408</sup> Gibson (2007:480) and Tepper (2007:42-43) give informative details about land fertilisation.

<sup>409</sup> It is interesting that the Angel in Judges 13 reiterated the forthcoming conception and birth of Samson to the would-be mother in a field (Jdg 13:9). Perhaps it was symbolic of a woman’s association with fertility and the farming land.

Shean, for example (Mazar 2006:115-116).<sup>410</sup> I surmise that in the IBA, as in the early Iron Age, women might have devoted four or five hours of their daily regime to agricultural activities (Meyers 1998:254). Ebeling (2010:35-36) cites Song of Songs 1:6, Ruth 2:2 and analogous Egyptian art as evidence for women's agricultural work.<sup>411</sup>

The mother of Samson might have actively participated in preparing an offering and building an altar, which strengthens the conclusion of her and other women's involvement in the farm fields of early Israel (Jdg 21:20). In that period farmers' daily lives were structured by the seasons and those chores related to each cycle (Borowski 2003:27). The Gezer calendar, an inscribed limestone tablet dated to the 10<sup>th</sup> century BC, presents information correlating to identical agricultural pursuits in the early Iron Age. The calendar contains a list of the months in the agricultural year and the corresponding farming activities undertaken during these periods (Borowski 2003:26-28; Gibson 2007:473; Ebeling 2010:5).<sup>412</sup>

#### *5.6.3.1 A season for ploughing and planting*

On the highlands of early Israel, men and women were fully occupied by the agricultural tasks as listed on the Gezer calendar. 'Planting (cereals), late planting (legumes and

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<sup>410</sup> The IBA represents a new pattern of settlement and lifestyle based on a sedentary farming life where agriculture and animal husbandry, including pigs, in all the Mediterranean climate zones away from many of the Early Bronze Age (EBA) III cities following the collapse of these cities (Mazar 2006:116 who lists various reasons for their disintegration). Mazar also comments that these cities may have been perceived to have been 'cursed' by the populations of the sedentary IBA peoples (Jos 6:26) who generally kept away from them.

<sup>411</sup> A light skin, which was thought to be a mark of beauty in women, was a sign of high status among women who could remain indoors and out of the sun (Goldenberg 2003:81, 85-86) unlike the rest of the women who worked on the farm fields unshielded from the sun. In Song of Songs the woman proudly attributed her dark skin to her work in the vineyards and likened it to the tents of Kedar, which has an implied spiritual meaning of beauty, wealth and strength (Fulton 2015) of both women and the land inhabited by the early Israelites.

<sup>412</sup> Macalister (1912a:54; 1912b:24) discovered the Gezer calendar in 1908 at the city of Gezer. Albright discusses the date of the calendar and his evidence for believing the calendar to have originated in the 10<sup>th</sup> century BC (1943:16-26). Albright, Wright, and King and Stager think of the plaque as the writing exercise of a boy at school (Albright 1943a; Wright 1955:50; King & Stager 2001:88; cf also Wirgin 1960:9-12; Talmon 1963:177 who find the calendar to be an apotropaic device to safeguard the seasons against harm). The writing on the tablet consists of seven lines with an incomplete vertically written eight line (Macalister 1912b:24; cf Sivan 1998:101).

Pagano ([sa]:3-9) provides insight on the debate concerning the text and language of the Gezer calendar. Following is Albright's translation of the script: 'His two months are [olive] harvest [his month is idiomatic in the Hebrew Bible, cf 1 Ki 5:7]; his two months are grain-planting; his two months are late planting; his two months is hoeing up of flax; his month is barley harvest; his month is harvest and festivity; his two months are vine-tending; his month is summer-fruit' (Albright 1943a:22-23; cf also Macalister 1912b:25-27; Wright 1950:50; Talmon 1963:177-187; Pritchard [ed] 1969:320; Borowski 2003:27).

vegetables), weeding, harvesting cereals and grapes, and ingathering other summer fruit, including olives<sup>413</sup> consumed the farmers' year, but 'the periods allotted to each chore also included sufficient time for' the women to process food and to produce 'by-products' (Borowski 2003:28). According to the list on the Gezer calendar, olives were harvested in the first two months from September to November. This was the final harvest of the agricultural year, marking the end of the summer season and the start of the rain season.

At this time the women would assist in the picking of the olives. The women would press the olives to 'secure their oil'. Later they would use the olive oil in their cooking and as fuel for lamps (Wright 1955:51). In October-November the farmers eagerly awaited the (first) rainfall.<sup>414</sup>

The longed-for rains softened the soil, making it ready for ploughing and sowing, which were done concurrently (King & Stager 2001:88; cf Wight 1953). Before ploughing could begin on the terraces and fields, however, the land had to be prepared for tilling. The land was cleared of stones, particularly in the mountainous regions<sup>415</sup> by means of a hoe or mattock (Feliks & Gibson 2007:483; cf Kohler & Mendes 1906; Deist 2000:147-148). Such a task would require a few more helpers.

Women already familiar with farming methods and instruments such as the use of the hoe in their vegetable gardens were probably enlisted to assist.<sup>416</sup> In addition, women

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<sup>413</sup> The Song of Deborah in Judges 5 does not reflect the farmers' preoccupation with agriculture (Agriculture in Israel 2015. From: <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/agriculture/agoverview.html#3>). It is essentially a victory hymn. Meyers (1988:59), however, points out that Judges 5:18 and 1 Samuel 1:21 include allusions to 'terraced fields'. From the documentary and archaeological evidences, she concludes that terracing happened together with (the Israelite) settlement on the highlands which facilitated crop cultivation. Though not a principal element in the song of Deborah, farmers' involvement in agricultural practices was intensive and continuous year after year.

<sup>414</sup> The rainfall which Kohler and Mendes term as the first rains (in early autumn) and the later rains (heavier downpours in winter) were so important to the farmers that the invocation in Deuteronomy 26:15 is viewed as an entreaty for rain and prayers that continued daily (Kohler & Mendes 1906; cf Wight 1953). Wight mentions that farmers would at times sow together as a security measure against thieves or when the farms were large (Wight 1953).

<sup>415</sup> Clearing the land not only involved the cutting down of trees, but also the removal of the multitude of boulders that were scattered across the fertile areas on the highland area between Lake Gennesaret and the Hauran mountains. Kohler and Mendes (1906) comment that the best use of these troublesome stones (and the avoidance of the laborious task of carting them off to other areas) was to use the stones in stone fences to prevent stray cattle from entering the fields. The stones were also used to build terraces. These terraces required constant care and protection from heavy rain showers.

<sup>416</sup> Wight comments that the methods used in the cultivation of grain remain the same for modern Palestinian Arabs (1953). A modern-day analogue of the pre-monarchic Israelite women is to be found in the women of Yemen living in rural areas in the present age. A contemporary study done in 1983 shows that women (and children) living in a village in the highlands of the Hujariyya district are still preoccupied with the same

may have assisted in the sowing of seeds because the period of the Judges was a time of wayward men and presumably absent male family members (Myntti 1984).

Gathered under her arm was a seed-filled leather bag, or a basket she had weaved in the courtyard. A farmer's wife would draw the seed from it and scatter them on the ground. A male family member walking closely behind her would immediately cover the soil with the plough (Wight 1953).

The sowing of cereals (barley and wheat) continued until late December. Sometimes, sowing extended into January (Wright 1955:52; Borowski 2003:28). No sooner was this done than it was time for the sowing of seeds such as sesame seeds, chick peas, lentils, cucumbers and melons. This activity occurred until late February, followed by weeding in March (Wright 1955:52; Borowski 2003:28).<sup>417</sup>

#### 5.6.3.2 *A season for weeding and hoeing*

Egyptian drawings depict the type of hoe (*ma'ader*) used (by women) for weeding their vegetable gardens (Feliks & Gibson 2007:486). The instrument was also used for the removal of harmful weeds from crops, which was a task for women as well (Feliks & Gibson 2007:486). To hoe the flax referred to by the Gezer calendar, women and servants probably came together in March-April and cut the plant with their hoes close to the soil. Later the women dried the stalks thus saved to manufacture cords and cloth (Wright 1955:53). Instead of the hoe, another method to eradicate undesirable vegetation such as thorn bushes was the slash and burn method (that involved the felling and burning of forest trees and vegetation to clear the area for agricultural use). Women would then use the resulting fires to cook food (Deist 2000:148).

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agricultural task as in ancient times and in a continuous yearly cycle. They prepare the soil for tilling in rainless winter months. In May they sow, taking care of the thinning, weeding, harvesting, threshing and winnowing of the grain as well as sifting and storage the grain. In addition, they are responsible for taking care of the children, various household duties such as carrying water and the process and preparation of food, cleaning the house and washing clothing (Myntti 1984; cf Meyers 1988:146; 1997:25, 27; 1998:254; Feinberg Vamosh 2013). In addition, it seems that parallel to the women in Judges who seem to have filled the gaps left by their men going off to war, these Yemeni women are occupying the economic and political roles within their households left vacant by the men as these men seek work abroad (Myntti 1984).

<sup>417</sup> See Wight (1953); Deist (2000:148-150); King and Stager (2002:92-93); Feliks and Gibson (2007:483-484); Ebeling (2010:34). King and Stager (2001:93) comment on the metaphorical importance of ploughing in the Bible.

#### 5.6.4 The processing of crops

##### 5.6.4.1 *A season for harvesting, winnowing and threshing*

The first crop to be harvested in May-June was barley, followed by wheat also in May-June, by using small sickles made of flint (see Figure 5.10; Wight 1953; Wright 1955:53-54; Ebeling 2010:34-35).<sup>418</sup> Pre-monarchic women, possible like the women in the Book of Ruth, were assigned to gleaning and making sheaves (Feliks & Gibson 2007:485). Harvesting began early to benefit as much as possible from the cooler morning period.

According to Feliks and Gibson, the farmer (and family members which probably included women and hired hands) would have worked quickly to avoid sunstroke (2 Ki 4:18), marauders, pests and ‘the scattering of the grain’ (Feliks & Gibson 2007:485; Feliks 2007:488). The women followed behind the men, gleaning and making sheaves by securing the grain into stacks (Feliks & Gibson 2007:485; cf Ebeling 2010:34-35).<sup>419</sup> The sheaves of grain were then taken to the threshing floors located outside the village, such as the one uncovered next to a terrace in the Modi’in region (Golani 2005:85).<sup>420</sup>

Threshing separated the grain from the stalks and ‘could be done by a sledge, cart and flailing with a stick’ (Kohler & Mendes 1906; Wight 1953; Wright 1955:53-54; Deist 2000:151-152; Borowski 2003:28; Feliks & Gibson 2007:485; Ebeling 2010:35). The threshing floor was in general a raised platform to make the best use of the wind for winnowing (King & Stager 2001:89).<sup>421</sup> The straw and chaff were removed from the grain by flinging the grain into the air with a wooden fork made with bent prongs or a large spade for the wind to blow the chaff away (Wight 1953; King & Stager 2001:89; Ebeling 2010:35).

According to Ebeling, the women gathered the remaining straw to transform them

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<sup>418</sup> Feliks and Gibson (2007:485) observe that ‘no special importance was ascribed to summer planting in ancient times’ as opposed to the significance of the harvests of winter crops (in summer) (cf Ex 9:31). At Passover, the Omer of barley was offered (Lv 23:10; cf Sm 21:9; 2 Ki 4:42). Before the Omer was offered, the new season’s grains were not eaten (Lv 23:14). Only in Jericho was harvesting permitted before Passover. Seven weeks later, the wheat harvest was initiated with the offering of the two loaves of bread (Lv 23:17).

<sup>419</sup> Feliks and Gibson discuss the numerous tools used for the harvesting processes and grain sheaves (2007:485). Also see Wight (1953).

<sup>420</sup> The Modi’in region is an area near the western foothills of the Judean-Samaritan anticline. In his report, Golani (2005:85) writes that the area contains a large expanse of ‘artificially smoothed bedrock’ surrounded by a vertical cut in the rock on its western and southern borders (Cf Wight 1953).

<sup>421</sup> Feliks (2007:488) recounts that not only did ‘the Israelites harvest their crops in haste’, but they also hid them in secret containers from marauders (Jdg 6:2). ‘Rather than use an exposed threshing floor, Gideon was forced to thresh his harvested wheat in a barn where fleeces were dried’ (Jdg 6:37-40).

into extra mats and baskets at a later, probably quieter time when the excitement of the harvest festivities was over (Ebeling 2010:35).



Figure 5.10 Ancient farming tools (plough points, sickles and a scythe)  
[<http://www.windowintothebible.com/ploughing?lightbox=i01y43>]

#### 5.6.4.2 *Sifting and storing*

Sifting was done with different sieves. It was an obligatory chore because the barley and wheat would still have a mixture of small quantities of chaff, tiny stones and weeds (Wight 1953). The women whose job it was sat down and shook the sieves holding the grain until the chaff moved to the top and was blown away by mouth. They would remove the stones and weed as well (Wight 1953; Borowski 2002:28).<sup>422</sup>

When the women were done with the sifting process, the grain was ‘stored either in jars, storage pits or in other storage facilities’ (Borowski 2003:28, 72-73). Smaller amounts of grain were also stored in barrels made with a mixture of clay and wickerwork inside the family house (Wight 1953; Borowski 2003:20). After the harvest of crops, one can only imagine the tiring and lengthy amounts of time women spent processing food and storing their products in their houses.

Among the storage vessels used by the women were ceramic containers *inter alia* earthenware known as hole-mouth jars because of their broad openings at the top (Shafer-

<sup>422</sup> One wonders if this last act of cleaning the grain removed fine sand particles as well. Scientists analysing the remains of Egyptian mummies have discovered that many suffered poor dental health resulting mostly from excessive tooth wear. It was suggested that the failure to remove fine sand particles *inter alia* during the sifting process introduced these inorganic (fine sand particles) substances into the bread and this in turn led to tooth abrasion (Forshaw 2009:421-424). Wright (1955:54), contrary to Wight (1953), also indicates that in ancient Israel, sifting through a sieve was not mandatory. Borowski (2003:66) notes that the flour of ancient Israelite household contained a great deal of grit that would have abraded the teeth of the Israelites, resulting in poor oral health.

Elliott 2014a:81-82)<sup>423</sup> which were discovered at Tel Halif as well as Iron II Tell en-Nasbeh (Brody 2011:243) and Tell Beersheba (Singer-Avitz 2011:285). The broad openings of these jars made scooping up grain or flour and liquids easier (Magness-Gardiner 1996:186). Many large storage jars were often found together in a room during excavations (Wright 1955:54).<sup>424</sup> At Tall al-‘Umayri, for example, a great number of *pithoi* (storage jars) were unearthed in room A2 and A3, with collared *pithoi* numbering among the storage jars found in room A3 (Herr 2006:63, 65, 67).<sup>425</sup>

The big ceramic storage jugs called *kad* would have been indispensable to Iron Age women. The *kad* were used for carrying water (Gn 24:15; 1 Ki 18:34) and storing corn (1 Ki 17:12) or flour (Hirsch & Benzinger 1906a; King & Stager 2001:142-143). Grain was also stored in ‘small plastered silos dug down through the floor of a home’ (Wright 1955:54) to preserve it from damp and pests (Borowski 2003:20). For larger amounts of grain underground cisterns in secret locations were in use. The Book of Judges describes the frequent raids on the Israelite storehouses by their enemies, which necessitated such measures (cf Jdg 6:3-6, 11).

Archaeologists found that at Gezer some of the mostly circular granaries discovered were associated with private houses, while others were communal storehouses (Wight 1953). Large underground public stone-lined silos have also been unearthed in Megiddo and a 9<sup>th</sup> century BC granary at Beth Shemesh. Wine and milk were conserved in bags manufactured with goat skins (Jdg 4:19), oil and honey in small clay jugs or metal jugs called *zappahat* (1 Ki 17:12), and fruits and pastry were preserved in different types of baskets (Hirsch & Benzinger 1906a).

### 5.6.5 The processing and preservation of crops

#### 5.6.5.1 Threshing, drying, pounding and grinding

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<sup>423</sup> Hole mouth jars (because of the hole at the top, these types of jars were called hole mouth jars) such as the one discovered at IBA Beth-Shean are described by Mazar as typical jars of the IBA period (Mazar 2006:111).

<sup>424</sup> Meyers (1997:15) comments that these storage jars are smaller than those in ‘previous or subsequent eras’ and intended for household use rather than commercial use. ‘The presence of storage pits ... far more common than in earlier or later eras, likewise attests to the household economic autonomy’.

<sup>425</sup> It appears that the storage jars used in Iron Age households were of mixed types. Dehnisch (2005:74) reports that the storage jars discovered at Tel Yin’am consisted of 5 various types. They form about 60% of the heterogeneous jars found at the site. This is a ‘trend’ that ‘continues throughout the Iron Age at Tel Yin’am’ which ‘contrasts with the homogeneous picture of storage jars at Late Bronze Tel Yin’am’.

The numerous storage pits and storage jars unearthed in the four-room houses demonstrate the considerable pains women went to in order to convert cereals, olives, fruits and herbs into comestibles that would last beyond the harvest season. Various ‘if not most of these preservation tasks’ were assigned to women, which extended their work responsibilities beyond the crop production practices (Meyers 1998:254). ‘They did much of the threshing, drying, pounding and pitting of foodstuffs’ to safeguard an annual supply of food resources (Meyers 1998:254). Women undertook the task of grain processing (grinding) and storage, and for those families, wealthy enough, servants and slaves would assist them (King & Stager 2001:94). According to the Book of Judges (cf Jdg 6:11, 25, 37), Gideon was a wealthy farmer who owned cattle, sheep, vines and wheat fields (Feliks 2007:488). Therefore, it can be concluded that the women in his household could afford servants and slaves to assist them with the indoor and outdoor chores.

Grape vines and olive trees<sup>426</sup> were the principal fruit trees grown by the Israelite farmers (Borowski 2003:29). The harvesting of the ripened grapes was in August-September (King & Stager 2001:99; Ebeling 2010:64), and from September to November olives were gathered (Wright 1955:51). Women made preservatives and jams with other fruits such as dates, figs, melons and pomegranates (see Borowski 2003:29). They also made wine made from dates and pomegranates. Vegetables were preserved and onions, garlic and cucumbers were probably pickled. Fruits and vegetables as well as herbs such as mint and marjoram could also be dried for future use (Borowski 2003:29).

#### 5.6.5.2 *Cutting, picking, pressing and preserving*

Vines and olives were processed in wine presses and olive presses respectively.<sup>427</sup> The women would store the wine and oil in jars for household use or barter (Borowski 2003:29). The grapes were harvested by cutting them from the vine with cropping knives (Borowski 2003:29). They were then placed in baskets and taken to the winepress. Winepresses were

<sup>426</sup> Deist (2000:140) discusses the significance of trees, in particular the olive tree in Judges 9:8-15.

<sup>427</sup> Ebeling comments that vine harvesting and wine-making involved the entire family and notes ‘ethnographic documentation shows women and children are active in family run vineyards including those in Palestine in the early twentieth century CE’. In addition, Proverbs 31:16 and Song of Songs 1:6 allocate viticulture with women’s labour (Walsh 2000:53-61; Ebeling 2010:66-67). Amiry and Tamari write that the entire family may have moved into small stone structures constructed in the vineyard fields and lived there during harvest time (Amiry & Tamari 1989:38).



discovered at sites such as in the Modi'in region (Golani 2005:74-79).<sup>428</sup> A time of joy accompanied the vine harvest and it was an occasion of festivity with dancing and singing enjoyed by the women (Jdg 21:19-23; Is 16:10; Jr 48:33; King & Stager 2001:99; Ebeling 2010:64).

#### *5.6.5.3 The grape harvest at Shiloh*

Apparently, the girls who danced in the vineyards at Shiloh participated in a women's only celebration of the annual grape harvest (Shiloah 1992:210). The women, without male accompaniment, performed the dance in an open field adjoining the vineyard (Jamieson, Fausset & Brown 1888a). The annual harvest dance is an indication of the autonomy enjoyed by young women in the Book of Judges. However, on this occasion the girls' independence made them vulnerable to crime at the hands of the Benjamites (Jamieson, Fausset & Brown 1888a). The rightful behavior of the women of Shiloh sharply contrasts with the criminal and wicked conduct of the elders and Benjamites. The entire episode in Judges 21 evidently denotes the state of degeneracy and lawlessness the Israelite tribes were falling into. The girls of Shiloh are most probably representations of the larger Israelite society in which women played such a vital role in preventing the eradication of their traditions and culture.

The women's ritualistic dancing performed by the girls of Shiloh (Jdg 21:19) would not have been the only event that connects viticulture with women's tasks (Ebeling 2010:67). Ebeling (2010:67) mentions several Biblical texts such as Proverbs 31:16 and Song of Songs 1:6 that link vineyards with women's duties (see above). The girls of Shiloh, therefore, would have been involved in other events that occurred in the vineyard, such as the cutting, picking, pressing and preserving of the grapes.

#### *5.6.5.4 At the winepress*

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<sup>428</sup> For more details about wine presses and their location in Iron Age Israel, see Walsh and Zefron (1998:154-161). Ebeling (2010:64-67) mentions that though Judges 14:5 places vineyards at some distance away from villages, the archaeological evidence indicates them to be quite close to the highland settlements. Different types of wine presses were uncovered (see Wright 1955:54; King & Stager 2001:98-101; Golani 2005:74-79).

The girls of Shiloh would probably have helped to empty the baskets laden with grapes into a small vat. Afterwards, the women trampled the grapes with their feet (Wright 1955:54). The resultant juice flowed from the sloped floor of the vat into a receptacle (Wright 1955:54). Perhaps the grape sap was left in the receptacle to ferment (King & Stager 2001:100). Alternatively, it could have been transported in jars and wineskins to the peoples' houses where the juice would be poured into bigger storage vessels for advanced fermentation and storing (Walsh 2000:148-149). Later the women used the remaining grapes to make raisins, fruitcakes and preservatives such as jams and juices (Ebeling 2010:64-65).<sup>429</sup>

#### 5.6.5.5 *The olive harvest*

Olives were harvested in October and November, at the end of the agricultural year (King & Stager 2001:96). The fruit was usually hand-picked or a long pole was used to beat the olives from the tree. The tree could also be shaken to release the fruit (King & Stager 2001:96). Once again, women's labour was needed to load the baskets of olives into a vat and then to press the oil from the olives with their feet (Mi 6:15). The women could also extract the oil from the olives by pounding the fruit with pestles (Wright 1955:51-52; King & Stager 2001:96-97). Khirbat Za'kuka, an Iron Age I site, presents a domestic circular olive press in the western part of a four-room dwelling where women might have extricated oil from olives (Eisenberg 2012).

#### 5.6.6 **Herdin**

Meat in general was not on the daily menu of the Israelites on the highlands except for special occasions such as religious rites. Sheep, goats and cattle were the main domesticated animals and mostly raised for their milk, meat (for sacrificial purposes), hide and, in the case of cattle, as draft animals<sup>430</sup> used in the ploughing season (Wright 1955:55;

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<sup>429</sup> Ebeling reports that raisin wine was among the varieties of wine that may have been produced in Iron Age I and cites the discovery of an 11<sup>th</sup> century BC jug at Shiloh with its strainer beside a heap of raisins that 'was interpreted as the residue from raisin wine strained and drunk at the site' (Dayagi-Mendels 1999:36; Ebeling 2010:64).

<sup>430</sup> Borowski notes that 'it is very difficult from the zoo-archaeological remains discovered at Iron Age sites such as Ashdod, Dan, Halif and Lachish whether the animals were originally (before the Iron Age) used for work or for milk.' In Iron Age I, however, they were used as beast of burden and for their dung (Borowski 1998:74, 76).

Borowski 2003:30; King & Stager 2001:119; Broyles 2010).<sup>431</sup> Milking the animals was part of the women's daily responsibilities (Meyers 1998:254; cf Wright 1955:55).<sup>432</sup> Since they were stabled in the safety of the ground floor of houses or courtyards, it naturally followed that feeding the domestic animals including dogs and donkeys<sup>433</sup> was left in the hands of the women (Wright 1955:55; Meyers 1998:254). Sheep shearing<sup>434</sup> and turning the hides into leather to be used as inter alia skins for wine and other liquids and oils was probably a male-oriented task.<sup>435</sup> Women, on the other hand, processed the milk they gathered from primarily the sheep and goats into cheese, yoghurt, butter and curds for household use. From goat's hair, the women made clothing, sacks, carpets and tent cloth (Wright 1955:55; Meyers 1998:254; King & Stager 2001:113-114; Borowski 2003:30).

## 5.7 FOOD PREPARATION

### 5.7.1 Cooking and women's authority

Although the Old Testament at times portrays men as cooking food<sup>436</sup> (Gn 19:3; 25:29-31, 40:1; Jdg 6:19; Ebeling 2010:49), the preparation of food, cooking and baking were naturally assigned to the women of the household (Hirsch & Benzinger 1906a).<sup>437</sup> The

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<sup>431</sup> In the ancient Near East and early Israel, sheep and goats were some of the earliest domesticated animals. Flocks in general consisted of both sheep and goats. Evidence of sheep and goats being driven together is found on the votive plaque from Nippur, the Standard of Ur (Borowski 1998:72; Broyles 2010). King and Stager mention that sheep, goats and pigs appear in the archaeological record of the Pre-Pottery Neolithic Age after the domestication of plants (King & Stager 2001:133). Popkin (2010:1203) comments that archaeological activities in the Bronze and Iron Ages of the southern Levant show that sheep, goats and cattle constituted about 90% of zoo-archaeological assemblages.

<sup>432</sup> According to scenes carved on Mesopotamian cylinder seals and bas reliefs, cattle were kept in sheds 'where milking and milk processing took place' (Borowski 1998:76).

<sup>433</sup> The possession of donkeys as a means of transport indicated a high level of status and their number a sign of wealth in pre-monarchic tribal community (cf Jdg 1:14-15; 10:4; 12:13; 19:3; Gn 12:16; 24:35; 30:43; 32:5; Job 1:3; Deist 2000:159; King & Stager 2001:115).

<sup>434</sup> Sheep shearing occurred in spring and was a time of great celebration (2 Sm 25:2). Naturally, wool was important to the pre-monarchic period and in Iron Age II it was a valuable article of trade. King and Stager mention that King Ahab of Israel received a gift of wool from one hundred thousand rams from the king of Moab (2 Ki 3:5; King & Stager 2001:113).

<sup>435</sup> Borowski (1998:63-71) cites Near Eastern textual records and art about the processing and uses of animal skins.

<sup>436</sup> However, according to Genesis 18, it is more probable that it was the women and servants of Lot's household that prepared the meal when Abraham was visited by angels. The text tells of Abraham selecting a fattened calf, but he left the actual preparation of it and the baking of bread to a servant and Sarah respectively while it appears the patriarch only set the meal including milk and curds before the angels (Gn 18:6-8).

<sup>437</sup> Ebeling and Rowan (2004:108-177) discuss the Iron Age household remains where evidence of women's hard labour in domestic food preparation, weaving and spinning were uncovered.

dietary laws of the ancient Israelites, as set out in the Hebrew Bible, were a defining quality of their identity as a people and was presumably scrupulously adhered to.<sup>438</sup> The ‘kitchen’ was a woman’s domain and the supervision and preservation of correct cooking methods<sup>439</sup> and eating utensils as well as the serving of cooked food were in the hands of women (Geffen 2007:658). Therefore, it follows that women experienced a certain amount of authority that went with these duties. This type of authority would have been elevated at cultic celebrations, particularly during Passover. According to Geffen, ‘communities and families had to trust and rely on women for meticulous observance’ of the dietary laws (*kashrut*). Such dependence on women was the result of their secret knowledge of the domestic practices associated with the Israelite dietary regulations (Geffen 2007:658). It would in no small part contribute to the existing power structures of women in their families and households.<sup>440</sup>

### 5.7.2 Domains of women’s status and authority

In this segment of the study, women’s roles, status and authority will be investigated by means of their economic activities in the household. This is in keeping with my premise that women were able to gain much status and authority by means of their productive and reproductive work in the household. Since YHWH valued women’s roles and positions in the community as equal to that of men, these covenantal principles allowed women to establish a heterarchical organisation in their households whereby all roles, tasks and responsibilities were considered to be valuable and equal. Benevolent patriarchy, in addition, would have allowed women to thrive and maintain their roles, status and

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<sup>438</sup> The dietary laws included the law that forbade eating pork. This law may have been established as some believe for hygienic and sanitary, aesthetic and folkloric, or ethical and psychological purposes (Rabinowicz & Geffen 2007:656; cf King & Stager 2001:119). It may also have been established to prohibit the Israelites from participation in the cultic rituals of their neighbours (Broyles 2012; cf Le Roux 2012:10-11). The Israelites, however, may not have upheld these laws since they were not practising a pure Yahwistic religion but rather one integrated with cultic elements from Canaanite religious rituals.

<sup>439</sup> The separation of dairy products and meat and ‘the ritual salting and soaking of meat’ is an example (Geffen 2007:657). Levine (2007:331) mentions specific cooking practices related to ritual meals. Rabinowicz and Geffen (2007:650:658) give a detailed description of ancient Israelite dietary laws: forbidden foods, slaughter of animals and preparation of meals.

<sup>440</sup> Geffen mentions that the ‘devotion of Jewish women [after the Babylonian exile] to the maintenance of the dietary laws is found throughout Jewish history’ and cites Hannah and her seven sons [in II Maccabees, Chapter 7] and Judith [in the Book of Judith] in the Second Temple period as examples of the courage and piety shown by women concerning *kashrut* (Geffen 2007:658).

associated authority and autonomy. Below, I will describe those places in the household where women performed much of their productive work such as food preparation and weaving. These were roles which were equally valued to men's positions in the public sphere.

#### *5.7.2.1 The sphere of female enterprises: the courtyard*

According to archaeological finds, an adult woman's household activities were typically concentrated in the main courtyard. The multifunctioning courtyard that used to serve as her childhood playpen had adequate room for a woman's chores. These chores included the processing of food, cooking, baking, grinding, weaving, and the storing of products for household use and/or the market (Baker 2002:118-119; Holladay 2009:65; Feinberg Vamosh 2013).<sup>441</sup> In the courtyard a woman or her husband received neighbours to conduct the 'business' of buying and selling of goods (or rather the exchange of products prevalent in early Iron I).

Chickens were raised in courtyards such as those discovered at Gezer (Macalister 1912a:168). Indeed, much of a family's daily non-task-related rituals, for example enjoying meals, entertaining guests and occasional sleeping, happened in the busy and lively large courtyard and it was only during winter and inclement weather that these 'comings and goings' were perhaps reluctantly transferred inside the house (Baker 2002:118-119). Women's productive activities in agrarian communities are usually construed to be related to 'indoor work' or to the domestic building.

These kinds of activities included taking care of the home and young offspring and naturally the small animals kept in the courtyard and, as mentioned before, food processing and textile manufacturing. Women's duties required a great deal of 'planning, skill, experience and technological knowledge' (Meyers 1997a:25-26). In terms of the

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<sup>441</sup> Meyers (1988:144-145), however, states that the early Israelites did not market their products, nor did they have 'access to the products of others'. She names two areas of support for this idea: the total absence of imported materials such as ceramics from other countries and the pits discovered at Iron Age I domestic sites such as those at Hazor. Yadin (1972) identified these places as storage pits and silos. Harvest materials were stored here. Meyers further comments that the lack of granaries in the villages reveals that households stored and kept their agrarian products (Meyers 1988:144-145; Yadin 1972). Borowski (2003:25) describes a family-based (subsistence) economic system in which their survival necessitated that the 'means of production were owned by and remained in the hands of the family'.

maintenance of the household economy, the aforementioned was a vital requisite. Meyers notes that ‘if men produced amounts, women produced things’ (Meyers 1997a:27). Consequently, women’s expertise, knowledge and organisation were essential in turning raw materials cultivated on the farms into edible and usable products that would endure until the following harvests and that could be exchanged and redistributed (Meyers 1997a:25).

#### 5.7.2.2 *The courtyard at ‘Izbet Sartah III and Aphek*

At ‘Izbet Şartah III and Aphek two different settlement patterns emerge as revealed by the types of courtyards in use (Gadot 2011:155-182). The women at ‘Izbet Şartah III were part of a closely cohesive social community who performed their daily activities in a large exterior and public courtyard. Food was prepared and consumed ‘in an open area’ where ‘there was no escape from public scrutiny’ (Gadot 2011:171).<sup>442</sup> The requirement for a huge public courtyard reveals the economic and functional needs of the community.

At Aphek (Stratum XII) women belonged to houses with private interior courtyards. The buildings at Aphek represent autonomous households where productivity was improved in ‘a household-based village’ (Gadot 2011:172).<sup>443</sup> Women in a group or groups performed their daily activities in the privacy of the household’s inner courtyard and away from the public eye of the community at large (cf Figure 5.11). It would have been rare, presumably, for women to work alone in a communal space. Jobs such as sifting, and grinding grain, preservation and storage that required long hours and the movement of heavy objects probably needed as many female hands as possible (Meyers 2003:430-431; Meyers 2002b:19; Ilan 2011:151).<sup>444</sup>

In both settlements (‘Izbet Şartah and Aphek), four-room houses were the most common residences (Gadot 2011:168, 173). The women of the household in House 109,

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<sup>442</sup> The public courtyard was shared by houses dating to the Late Bronze Age-Iron Age transition (Gadot 2011:168, Table 1). Though houses at ‘Izbet Şartah had inner courtyards (Gadot 2011:169, Table 2), the ‘majority of everyday activities were performed out in the public realm’ (Gadot 2011:170-171). It seems that at ‘Izbet Şartah, women, for example, performed their duties in the large public courtyard which, unlike the privacy of the inner courtyards, was an open area.

<sup>443</sup> The village of ‘Izbet Şartah I-II also reflects ‘autonomous units of houses representing extended families ... with clear social ranking and accumulation of wealth’ (Gadot 2011:179).

<sup>444</sup> Meyers (2002b:19) places these tasks in two categories: ‘simple simultaneity’ involving several women (or men) doing the same task (grinding grain for instance) at the same time, and ‘complex simultaneity’ where various tasks are performed by different people at the same time.

which is bigger and more complex than the other buildings at 'Izbet Sartah, appear to have been high-ranking and wealthy, according to Gadot (2011:175). A paved outer courtyard was also discovered next to House 109 (Gadot 2011:169). Here it can be surmised that the senior women were probably in charge of an extended female workforce of perhaps grinders, cooks and weavers who formed part of the household (Gadot 2011:178). Clay ovens found in courtyards at Tell el-Far'ah to the north are evidence of baking activities, for example (Meyers 2002b:23).

#### *5.7.2.3 Female groups and networks in the courtyards*

Meyers describes the women's areas in the courtyard as spaces where women could form 'organizational structures' based on their 'common interests' such as food storage and preservation, cooking, baking as well as other activities such as weaving and cloth making, and naturally reproduction and related issues. 'The Israelite culture as in any traditional society, depended on a corpus of information and the existence of (women) practitioners' equipped with knowledge, skills and training (Meyers 2006:247-248). The information possessed by skilled and trained women was significant not only to the Israelite household but also to the wider society. It was also very important that the women were able to 'transmit this information across generations' (see Figure 5.11; Meyers 2006:247).



Figure 5.11 Ancient central courtyard (reconstruction) ([http://www.jesus-story.net/buildings\\_NT.htm](http://www.jesus-story.net/buildings_NT.htm))

For example, analogous studies of bread-making in Egypt reveal that converting grains into food and drink involved complicated procedures that required the utilisation of

specialised equipment and installations (Ebeling 2010:49).<sup>445</sup> Women from several households would work together daily to accomplish this task around a communal oven or weaving installations. In this way, the (older) women would transmit their knowledge of the bread-making processes and equipment, for instance, to the other (younger) women in their group – keeping it in their women’s only circle (Geffen 2007:658).

This shared type of women’s labour pattern that resulted in a communal female bond was precisely the type of structure that underpinned the cooperation needed by the Israelite society in Iron Age I as a stabilising and cohesive entity (Meyers 2006:248; Zonabend 1996:25-39). Women’s networks thus fit the pattern of ‘cooperation, reciprocity and mutual assistance’ that existed across Israelite ‘families and even communities’ shown by research to have been ‘essential for maintaining stability and for providing aid in time of personal, political, or economic travail’ (Meyers 2006:248) as the period of the Judges, for instance, was prone to be.

Deborah lauding Jael in Judges 5:24 and the circle of women around Jephthah’s daughter in Judges 11 are female characters that are appropriate to the model described by Meyers. The perception and understanding of Samson’s mother concerning the national crisis in Judges 13, that is the oppression of the early Israelites by the Philistines,<sup>446</sup> and Micah’s mother ‘coming to his aid’ in Judges 17:1-4 are more examples of the women’s appreciation and support of situations that called for their assistance. Micah’s mother apparently recognised the need for a shrine (for idols – which was against the will of YHWH) by the household and the community. Perhaps the young women of Shiloh in Judges 21:21-23 as well as the woman in Judges 9:53 may all indicate a ‘sisterhood’ of women unmentioned by the Bible writers. They were ready and prepared to offer their assistance, albeit probably reluctantly at first by the girls of Shiloh, to a nation in need. Ostensibly, the young women involved seem to have acquiesced to this situation as the

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<sup>445</sup> Ebeling (2010:49) notes that many of these tools and installations including ‘sieves, winnowing baskets, trays, paddles, stone mortars, wooden pestles, hand stones, querns, brushes, jars and pieces of cloth for collecting flour from around grinding areas’ appear in the archaeological record of Egypt, but little evidence of these tools remain in the archaeology of Syro-Palestine (see also Samuel 1999:222).

<sup>446</sup> Exum (2009a) points out that the woman received more information than her husband about the child. In my opinion, this was probably because she seemed to be more aware of the dire situation in her society and the solution to it. She also appeared to be more trusting of the Angel and more willing to be a part of that solution than her husband. Her husband, being a case of seeing is believing, required a third visitation by the Angel.



Bible writers do not mention other outcomes such as the men of Shiloh, for example, going to war to bring their daughters home or the daughters themselves requesting to return to their households (Jdg 19:2). I am certain these acts in Judges 9:53; 11 and 21:21-23, for example, were carefully considered and discussed with other women in their groups and common conclusions were reached to benefit their households and community.

It is also conceivable to think of the ‘kitchen’/cooking area or courtyard as places where the women of the Israelite households kept the social and economic fabric of the pre-monarchic community intact.

#### *5.7.2.4 The pre-monarchic ‘kitchen’ – the large central space*

The multi-functional central space in the four-room house probably also served as the ‘kitchen’ of the pre-monarchic women. The huge dimensions of the central space (see Ebeling 2010:30; Singer-Avitz 2011:288; Albertz & Schmitt 2012:32) encompassed a variety of household activities including functioning as the family assembly place where food consumption occurred (Bunimovitz & Faust 2003:415). In this area, the women of the household also grounded grain and prepared the dough for cakes and bread (Meyers 2002b:22; cf Bunimovitz & Faust 2003:412; Holladay 2009:71; Gadot 2011:168, Table 1; Singer-Avitz 2011:280, 285-286; Nakhai 2011:358). The cakes and bread were baked in clay ovens installed in the central space. This area thus became a communal area for women where they performed their specific duties (Meyers 2002b:22).

##### *a. The household hearth*

The heart of female authority and economic enterprise, it appears, was the ‘kitchen’ or rather the household hearth (see Dever 2012:188).<sup>447</sup> In general, this cooking area was a room located at the front of the Israelite dwelling ([see above] Byers 2013a; cf Panitz-Cohen 2011:89; Singer Avitz 2011:282-285). Cooking and food preparation were also

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<sup>447</sup> It was only the very rich and those living in palaces that had a specific room for cooking purposes. The common people had to make do with primarily a simple hearth in a shared space (Hirsch & Benzinger 1906a). Archaeologists have discovered the most ancient hearth used for making and utilising fire, dating it to 300 000 BC in Israel at Qesem Cave. Similar to later hearths, it was a centrally located area (Graber 2014). Charred bones, flint, wood ash and burnt clay fragments suggest it was used for activities other than cooking and therefore indicates a shared space and that it was, according to scientists’ understanding of gendered division of space, a place used by women and men for their specific purposes (Graber 2014; cf Shahack-Gross et al 2014 give a detailed analysis and discussion of the hearth in Qesem Cave).

done in the courtyard where other activities such as grinding were performed as well (Ebeling 2010:50; cf Shai et al 2011:126). The furnishing and design of the Israelite cooking area<sup>448</sup> was no different from those of their neighbours (see Byers 2013a; cf Ilan 2011:145). According to Singer-Avitz (2011:292), ‘ovens (see 5.7.2.5 b) are considered the most basic components for defining the existence of a kitchen’ and therefore, oven locales designate areas of women’s activity (Singer-Avitz 2011:292).

The oven (see 5.7.2.5 b) appears in domestic locations from one historical period to the next and thus indicates a continuity and uniformity in women’s domestic activities in the ancient Near East. Excavations at Philistine Tell Gezer (a site ca 1200-900 BC, occupied by ancient Canaanites, Egyptians, Philistines and Israelites at one time or another) reveal an oven as well as a flat stone probably used as a surface to prepare meals and a storage bin for grain in the case of Tell Gezer ([women’s domestic equipment, see 5.7.2.5], Kuntz 2009:165).<sup>449</sup> Similarly, at Bronze Age Canaanite Tell el-Hammam in Jordan an oven (see Figure 5.18) as well as a flat stone surface for food preparation were uncovered (Byers 2013a).

Cooking installations (ovens) located in courtyards were also uncovered at Middle Bronze Age sites such as Megiddo and at Late Bronze Age sites, for example Hazor (Ben-Dov 1992:101, 104). Apparently, at the time of Iron Age Tel el-Far‘ah and Tell en-Nasbeh, little had changed for Canaanite and proto-Israelite women in their ‘kitchens’ as far as their contents were concerned (Netzer 1992:196, 199).<sup>450</sup>

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<sup>448</sup> Ben-Tor mentions that ‘there are distinctions between an open cooking installation [hearth] and a closed one [oven]’. The hearth in general was made from one or more sheets of rock enclosed by smaller unhewn stones. These types of hearths were found in Early Bronze Age Tell el-Far‘ah (north), Ai and Tanaach (Ben-Tor 1992:66). Hearths were also found at Late Bronze Age settlements in the Sharon Plain and the Negev. In the Hill Country, cooking ovens were excavated near pits (Herzog 1992a:232).

<sup>449</sup> Gur-Arieh et al (2012:121-131) provides a study on the pebble hearth discovered at Philistine Tell el-Safi.

<sup>450</sup> Further cohesions between Israelite and non-Israelite women include the uniformity of the material culture within the pre-monarchic period (which include the four-room house and collared rim jars, previously thought to be unique to Israelite towns and villages outside the Hill Country). This suggests the sharing of common bonds between the Israelites and the surrounding nations, in Ammon and Moab, for example (Miller & Hayes 1986:72). Wade and Mattingly (2003:73-75) describe the domestic activities (of women) in a room uncovered at Iron Age Khirbat al-Mudaybi, an ancient Moabite settlement. Clay looms, weights, and cooking and grinding installations discovered indicate weaving practices and food preparations were done in the same area. Iron II ceramics – bowls, jars and a lamp – were also found (Wade & Mattingly 2003:73-75).

These items of household equipment were probably typical tools used in ancient Canaan in the domestic areas of the various nations. Philistine bichrome ceramics were more in use in the Lowlands rather than the collared rim storage jars of the Israelites, which seems to imply that the Israelite woman shared the same style in household articles (cooking pots) and equipment (ovens) as her Philistine counterparts (Homan 2002:49; Shafer-Elliott 2013). Hearths and ovens that served as cooking installations have been uncovered

The proto-Israelite women also experienced little change in their ‘kitchens’, presumably because they had to adapt to a new environment (in the Hill Country) and found themselves managing the household economy (that *inter alia* included food storing and preparation, weaving and reproduction) as well as new responsibilities such as farming duties. It can be imagined that among the many strange things in their lives in the Hill Country, the one familiar thing remained – their ‘kitchens’ – and women’s specific roles and duties that granted them their status, autonomy and authority [under YHWH’s rule and covenantal laws] (see Willett 2001; cf Jdg 14:2-3; 17:2-4).

b. The ‘kitchen’ at Tell Halif

At 8<sup>th</sup> century BC (Iron Age II) Tel Halif in Areas E6, E7 and D7 in the northern part of Field V, a floor was found that formed part of a room referred to by Frank as the ‘kitchen’ (Frank 2012:56; see Figure 12). This room may be typical of a food preparation and cooking area in the preceding Iron Age I. In this room ‘an oven, several jars, grinding stones and pots’ were discovered (Frank 2012:56) that are indicative of a woman’s work area.<sup>451</sup> The ‘kitchen’ is described by Frank (2012:59) as a quadrilateral room with a ‘niche with an oval installation’ in the northern part. In the southwestern part 64 loom weights were found, and ‘directly east of the loom weights ... a whole oil lamp’ was uncovered. A cooking pot and a juglet were unearthed in the eastern part of the ‘kitchen’ (Frank 2012:59). A bread oven (tannur) was found to the north of the loom weights. Numerous pottery pieces were located north and east of the oven. Pieces of grinding stones were also found near the oven.<sup>452</sup> These artefacts are evidence of food processing and preparation done by women in the ‘kitchen’ at Tell Halif (Holladay 1992:3736).<sup>453</sup>

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in Israel in areas belonging to Canaanite, Israelite and Philistine nations at Tell es Safi/Gath (associated with the Philistine people) and Tell Megiddo (Arieh 2013:50-67).

<sup>451</sup> Frank (2012:58) notes that ‘the pottery forms are similar’ to the ones found at ‘Lachish Level III ... Tell Beit Mirsim Stratum A ... and Tell Beer Sheba’ and ‘represent mainly Judahite forms’.

<sup>452</sup> Frank (2012:80-98) describes more details regarding these installations (bread oven and oval installation) and grinding stones.

<sup>453</sup> Holladay (1992:3736) notes that the vertical loom was set up in the ‘kitchen’ or ‘occasionally in the foyer which looked out upon the courtyard and was a preferred location for spinning and women’s socialization’.

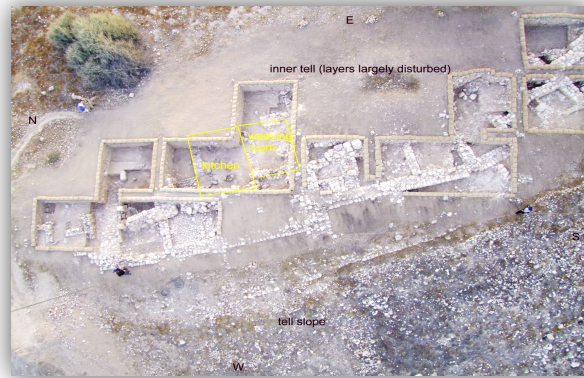


Figure 5.12 Ancient kitchen at Tell Halif (Field V at Tell Halif with ‘kitchen’ and ‘loom weight room’ [Frank 2012:54])



Figure 5.13 Oven in the ‘kitchen’ at Tell Halif (Frank 2012:54)

### c. Rooftops

Rooftops were flat and they served as the family’s sleeping quarters (in warm weather), cult areas, and were used for other domestic activities (Ebeling 2010:31; cf Jr 19:13; cf Jdg 9:53; 2 Sm 11:12; Jos 2:6-8). Remains of exterior staircases at Tell Beit Mirsim, Beer Sheba, Hazor, Shechem and Jerusalem imply the widespread use of roofs (Holladay 1992:3732). Thus, depending on the season and the activity, roofs were utilised (see Ebeling 2010:29; cf King & Stager 2001) by women and on these occasions considered to be a women’s specific work area. The women of the household could also access the roof via ladders or ramps. Here they would socialise and dry clothes as well as food and other agrarian products such as ‘washed grain’. Roofs also served as the temporary storage

area for ‘dried fodder, brush wood and wooden equipment’ (Holladay 1992:3737)<sup>454</sup> such as looms perhaps?

#### *5.7.2.5 The cooking vessels of women*

Proverbs 31 sheds light on the household and economic activities of women during the Iron Age in ancient Israel that remained unchanged from one generation to the next. Therefore, it can be assumed that for the women in the pre-monarchic period, cooking, baking and the series of events connected with these daily tasks formed an important part of their daily routine. Dever (2012:188) comments that baking bread was a ‘commonplace domestic’ task in which women played a ‘central role’. The bowls and cooking pots discovered in some rooms in houses at Tel Dor (Gilboa, Sharon, & Zorn 2004:32-59) show evidence of women’s activities and spaces.<sup>455</sup> Dever (2012:188) reports that ‘women used millstones [the saddle quern, ‘handmill’] to grind wheat or barley’ (see below; cf Isa 47:2; Job 31:10). Women also used ‘smaller mortar and pestles’ to crush grain (cf Pr 27:22) and ‘cooking vessels’ [see below] such as ‘a pan or a griddle’ (cf Lv 2:5, 7; Dever 2012:188).

The courtyard or kitchen of a household would have been filled with the sounds and hearty fragrances of cooking and baking coming from the pots bubbling on cooking pits and in the clay ovens (see below). It was in their ‘kitchen’ that women, according to Meyers, made their most significant contribution to the economy of Iron I Israel and where they gained positions of authority as they skilfully managed cooking tasks – mainly the conversion of grains into bread (Meyer 2002b:14; Ebeling & Homan 2008:45). Grinding flour and preparing meals were daily activities of the women of the household (Yeivin 2007:204).<sup>456</sup>

#### a. Cooking pots

<sup>454</sup> Apart from roof tops water wells were probably also areas where women socialised and established networks (Meyers 2002b:19).

<sup>455</sup> At the same site, a clay jar in which linen cloth bags filled with silver and clay seals were found in addition to looms indicative of women’s presence in the town (Stern 1998).

<sup>456</sup> Hirsch and Benzinger (1906a) note that ‘even ladies of rank thought it no degradation to cook and princess Tamar is said to have displayed especial skill in preparing certain articles of food’ (2 Sm 13:8).

Earthen cooking vessels,<sup>457</sup> discovered in 8<sup>th</sup> century BC Lachish and many other sites as mentioned above. Storage and cooking vessels were unearthed in houses 1008, 1002, 1003, 1078, 1080, 1043. In 7-6<sup>th</sup> century BC Tell Masos a cooking pit, cooking pot and jugs and bowls were discovered in room 42 and cooking pot and vessels in Area G rooms. These discoveries reveal the utensils used by women during their cooking endeavours. Other sites where evidence of women's cooking activities was found include 10<sup>th</sup> century BC Tell el Far'ah. Cooking installations and vessels were uncovered in the courtyards of houses in Level 7b. At 8<sup>th</sup> century BC Tell Beersheba cooking tools were found in courtyards and rooms in Stratum 2. An oven was found outside room G8005 as well as clay vessels in the interior space at Tel Halif (Willett 2001; Ortiz 2006:588-610).<sup>458</sup>

Three different types of cooking pots – the 'traditional' pot or Canaanite jar, the Philistine jug and the hybrid pot – were also uncovered. The hybrid pot was a combination of the LB Canaanite pot and the Philistine jug (Ilan 2011:145-146; Shafer-Elliott 2013; cf Figure 5.14 and Figure 5.15).<sup>459</sup>

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<sup>457</sup> Yeivin (2007:203) gives details concerning how these 'simple and undecorated' vessels were made. King and Stager (2001:139) describe pottery used by the Israelite highlanders as 'relatively few (in) ceramic forms' consisting of 'two handled cooking pots, with triangular or flanged rims, collared-rim store jars [or pithoi] and undecorated bowls and juglets' (as opposed to the variety of 'ceramic repertoires' consisting of decorated and painted clay vessels produced by the Philistines, cf King & Stager 2001:139; Killebrew 2006:567).

Ebeling (2010:53) reports that women probably manufactured the handmade undecorated pottery used in domestic settings. Ebeling's premise is collaborated by Rudd (2015) who maintains that in addition to the Negev pottery made by soldiers, such pottery was also produced by the Israelite women living the Negev in 900 BC, cut off and isolated as they were from urbanised areas. Wood (2011) comments that research of pottery-making in contemporary societies show that when earthenware is made by hand and fired in open fires, such as the Negev pottery was, it is generally created by women.

Smith and Levy (2008:81) question the Negev pottery as an ethnic marker signifying manufacture by a particular ethnic group. Kletter (2006:275, 578-579) gives his insights on ethnic markers and those markers inter alia the four-room house, cooking pots and collared rim jars as identifying the Israelites as an ethnic group. Killebrew (2006:568-570) sees 'a mixed [ethnic or cultural] picturing emerging' regarding possible modes of production of collared *pithoi* at various Iron I sites. They were produced at sites such as Giloh 'itinerant potters who travelled from village to village in the region' (Killebrew (2006:568-570). The different opinions above denote the debate between scholars about whether the collared rim pithoi are 'markers' that are characteristic of the Israelite as a cultural group in ancient Israel (Cf also Dever 2003:118-125, 150-161, 192-197, 210 and Ilan 2011:145).

<sup>458</sup> Byers (2013b) reports on cooking vessels discovered at 9<sup>th</sup> century BC Tell el-Hammam, Jordan (see Figure 5.14, 5.15). Byers (2013b) describes the cooking pots found here as resembling those discovered at Israelite settlements of the same period and consisting mainly of wide-mouthed cooking pots made with circular shaped bases and ceramic frying pans with flat bases. Cahill (2006:434-435) labels the ceramic assemblage at 11<sup>th</sup> century BC Tell el-Hammah that includes open cooking pots, storage jars and closed cooking jugs as typical of assemblages uncovered at sites such as Beth-Shean, Hazor, Megiddo, Shiloh, Tell Qiri and Rosh Zayit in strata belonging to the same period.

<sup>459</sup> The Philistine jug may be what Hirsch and Benzinger (1906a), citing 1 Kings 7:13, refer to as the '*sir*' (cf King & Stager 2001:145). Shafer-Elliott (2013) provides a fuller description of these different types of

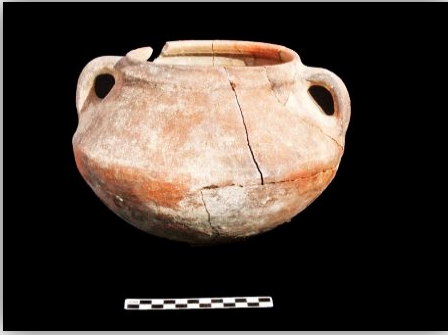


Figure 5.14 Cookpot (Byers 2013b)

Figure 5.15 Ancient cook pot (Discovered at 8<sup>th</sup> century BC Tall el-Hammam, Jordan [Byers 2013b])

### b. Ovens

The most common ovens used by Israelite women in their households were the *saj*, *tannur* and *tabun* types (King & Stager 2001:66-67; Ebeling 2010:50-51; Shafer-Elliott 2013; Byers 2013b). The *saj*, a flat stone heated by a fire underneath it, was the simplest oven (cf Figure 5.16). Dough was placed on the hot stone and then covered with the ashes previously removed from the fire (Ex 12:39; 1 Sm 28:24; 1 Ki 19:6). The most popular ovens in use were the *tannur* and *tabun*, beehive structures made with clay (King & Stager 2001:66-67; Borowski 2003:73-74; Ebeling 2010:50-51; Shafer-Elliott 2013; Byers 2013b). A lid covered the opening at the top. The *tannur* was heated by wood placed under the oven and the dough was placed and baked on the inside walls of the *tannur* that was heated by the fire. Bread was also baked on the inside of the *tabun* and heated by the dung that was placed on the outside of the oven by the women who had collected it sometime before (see Figure 5.17 and Figure 5.18; King & Stager 2001:66-67; Borowski 2003:73-74; Ebeling 2010:50-51; Shafer-Elliott 2013; Byers 2013b).<sup>460</sup>

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cooking pots. The traditional pot or 'Canaanite jar' was mostly used inside a closed oven (King & Stager 2001:145-146; Panitz-Cohen 2011:87-93; Shafer-Elliott 2013).

<sup>460</sup> Mulder-Heymans (2005:197-221) discusses clay ovens found at Iron Age Tel Hadar, Israel and the behaviour of socio-cultural behaviour connected to baking in the clay ovens in the present age. See also an experimental archaeological report by an excavation team building a *tannur* and preparing and baking loaves of bread like the ancient Israelites at Tell Halif as well as the results of this endeavour (Shafer-Elliott 2015; see Figure 5.17).



Figure 5.16 Modern saj (photo: Halima Sha)



Figure 5.17 Biblical bread: Baking like the ancient Israelites (Shafer-Elliott 2016)



Figure 5.18 Clay oven from the Old Testament period at Tall el-Hammam, Jordan (Byers 2013c)

Small amounts of grain were ground in mortars with pestles and the resultant rough pulp was used in several different dishes (Borowski 2003:73). Mortars could be movable or cut into rock (Borowski 2003:73) such as the mortar carved from a limestone rock found in the central room of house 500 at Khirbat al-Mudayna al-‘Aliya. Here three *tabun* ovens and a basalt saddle quern or hand mill were also found (Routledge 2009:45). *Tabun* ovens and cooking vessels (amphorae) were also found at (Philistine) Tiryns (Brody 2011:243). Ovens were discovered in front rooms at Tell Beersheba and grinding stones in a central room also at Tell Beersheba (Singer-Avitz 2011:285, 291).

### c. Grinding stones

Flour was made with a pair of grinding stones by rolling grain between a smaller upper stone and a bigger lower stone (Borowski 2003:73; cf Figure 5.19). ‘Grind stone and mortar



and pestle assemblages occur at a frequency of one, rarely two per household at Iron Age Tel Dan suggesting a household mode of production ...<sup>461</sup> (Ilan 2011:14). According to Meyers (2003b:430-431), the material culture of ancient Israelite settlements attests to the production of bread in ‘individual households’ during the Iron Ages. The equal distribution of the 13 grindstones uncovered at late 11<sup>th</sup> to early 10<sup>th</sup> centuries BC ‘Izbet Šartah, for instance, (1-3 in every dwelling) are indicative of domestic bread production. Evidence that several individuals were processing grain at the same time is found in the discovery of several grinding stones in a household. Consequently, it is believed that the difficult processes involved in converting grains into flour occurred in the household (Meyers 2003b:430-431) under the supervision and management of women.



Figure 5.19 Grinding stones (Basalt upper [pestle] and lower [mortar] grinding stones used by Israelite women in Old Testament period [Byers 2015])

#### 5.7.2.5 *The daily menu*

Two cooked meals were prepared and consisted of stews, gruel, or soups served with bread (Bascom 1951:125-137). The first meal consisted of porridge or gruel made with barley, lentils, chickpeas and spelt. The women presumably prepared it in the small hybrid pot (Bascom 1951:125-137). Apparently, lunch consisted of bread, cheese, dried fruit, parched grain, vegetables, fruit and water (cf 1 Sm 25:18). In the evening a hot meal, usually a stew or a soup, was prepared. Meat was rarely eaten and only during special occasions (Shafer-

<sup>461</sup> A mode of production that was in the hands of women. Women’s work areas are also attested to in the archaeological record of the ancient Near East, for example at excavations at Zincirli an archaeological team found ovens, mortars and grindstones in the buildings in Area 5 (Herrmann 2011:310) that is indicative of domestic activities and therefore work areas controlled by women.

Elliott 2013; cf Lussier 1961:326-331; King & Stager 2001:67-68). As beverages, the women served water, milk, juices, wine or possibly beer (Borowski 2003:70, 74). According to Ebeling and Homan (2008:46), beer was ‘associated with the domestic sphere’, implying that women were closely associated with beer production. Ebeling and Homan (2008:62) suggest women’s control of ‘brewing activities’ for which the archaeological analyses of household spaces may provide evidence.

## 5.8 WEAVING AND THE MAKING OF CLOTH

### 5.8.1 Women as ancient artists of weaving

A general feature of the Israelite household was the loom (Jdg 16:13).<sup>462</sup> Evidence for women’s weaving practices is found in the plethora of ancient clay and stone loom weights (cf Figure 5.20), bone, ceramic and stone spindle whorls unearthed in Israel in houses and courtyards (Willett 2001; Daviau et al 2002:194-198; Dever 2012:165). Apparently, special knowledge, skill and training in weaving were taught only to the men in certain families of the tribes of Judah and Dan after their departure from Egypt and some time before their entry into Canaan (Ex 35:30-35; 1 Chr 4:21; Unger 1988b).

According to Exodus 35:30-35, the people were already proficient in weaving and spinning before their entry into Canaan. Exodus 35:25, however, indicates that the women were already knowledgeable in weaving techniques and processes prior to this.



Figure 5.20 Loom weights from Yodefat and Gamla (Jenkins 2011)

These texts suggest that it was specifically the men who had to be taught weaving practices. Consequently, it can be inferred that weaving, as women’s specific task, was

<sup>462</sup> Dever (2005:24) also reports on ‘bone tools for sewing, weaving and leatherwork’ as utensils found in typical 8<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> century BC houses.

already an Israelite custom before their settlement in Canaan.<sup>463</sup> Weaving skills and technology are reflected in the Book of Judges – in 14:12-13 and 16:13-14. This premise is supported by studies of spinning and weaving practices in ancient Near Eastern societies that show the women of the household were involved in weaving activities (Shamir 2014:148; Clayton 2014a; Abrahami 2014:293-294; Baccelli et al 2014:118).<sup>464</sup>

The various textile fragments discovered at Mo'a in the 'Arava valley are dyed green, blue, brown, red or blue (Shamir 2005:103). Such evidence clearly indicates the various hues preferred for clothing.<sup>465</sup> Exodus 26:1 describes the construction of the Tabernacle with blue, purple, scarlet and fine twined linen. The Israelites may have acquired their skills in cloth dyeing from the Egyptians who were skilled producers of fine linen (Fletcher 1997).<sup>466</sup> Prior to the Israelite conquest, the Canaanites also held a long tradition of weaving and dyeing their own textiles as revealed at Ugarit and Byblos (Unger 1988a).

That Canaanite women were familiar with the art of weaving and dyeing is borne out by the appearance of flax on the roof of the house of Rahab and the crimson thread inside (Jos 2:6, 18; Unger 1988c). Israelite women came from a long line of women

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<sup>463</sup> Exodus 35:30-35 narrate the imbuelement of Bezalel from the tribe of Judah and Oholiab from the tribe of Dan with Divine knowledge and skill in the art of weaving and embroidery. They were also given the ability to teach others (men and women) in their communities (1 Chr 4:21; cf Unger 1988b). In my opinion, the narrative seems to indicate that the Israelite women, perhaps because they were familiar with Egyptian practices, only had to be taught special techniques in the weaving and embroidery arts that would distinguish the Israelites from their neighbours. That the men were taught these skills too may well have to do with alleviating some of the burden regarding their daily chores borne by women as weaving and finer needlepoint work were time-consuming tasks (cf Ex 35:26 where only the skilled women who were able to were called to spin the goat's hair, probably because they had other duties).

Also, with the invention of the vertical loom in ca 1570-1293, Egypt necessitated greater physical power that led to more men becoming weavers in that country and elsewhere (Hill 2010). In addition, Bulbach (1989:1) mentions that the weaving arts predate 'the advent of pottery ... and written records'. He goes on to say that 'evidence shows ... the first pots were clay-coated woven baskets'. The earliest texts indicate 'complex textile industry that goes well beyond solving the basic needs of survival'. 1900 BC tablets from Sumerian Ur, for example, record the yearly conversion of 4 million pounds of wool into textile materials. These are 'based originally on the far older' household 'textile production' which woman controlled and managed.

<sup>464</sup> Shamir (2014:148) points out Bronze Age Aegean and Near Eastern texts in fact refer to the capture of women to serve in the weaving industries of larger households. Ancient artefacts from the ancient Near East such as cylinder seals and sculptures indicate that textile producers were woman since the earliest periods (Clayton 2014a; cf also Clayton 2014b on weaving factories in the ancient Near East; Tetlow 2004:150; Baccelli et al 2014:97-142).

<sup>465</sup> Willett (2001) writes that women wore blue and green stones as protection against the evil eye.

<sup>466</sup> Unger (1988a) notes that the Israelites excelled in the skill of cloth dyeing, probably more so than in any of the other crafts.

weavers beginning with their nomadic existence in which they became experts at spinning, weaving and transforming the hair of camels and goats and the wool of sheep into coarse cloth for garments and tent coverings (Hirsch & Benzinger 1906b; Unger 1988d). Hirsch and Benzinger (1906b) comment that it was in Canaan that the Israelites refined their weaving methods.<sup>467</sup>

The presence of a loom in Delilah's house and its use by her (Jdg 16:13) is an indication that women in the pre-monarchic period were familiar with weaving and weaving techniques. Evidence of an industrial-sized weaving industry that probably originated from early household weaving practices has been uncovered at Beth Shemesh located around Zorah, Samson's birth town (Bromiley et al [eds] 1979:730). The valley of Sorek where Delilah lived is also in the same area. Judges (Jdg 16:13-14) mentions Delilah's weaving skills (cf 5.2.6; Bush 1844:208). Deborah alludes to a textile craft (Jdg 5:30; Schloen 1993:30)

## **5.8.2 The economics of weaving**

### *5.8.2.1 The home and guilds of women weavers*

It can be said that the proto-Israelites shaped and transformed the materials in their environment into diverse forms in order to meet familial or communal needs required for their survival on the highlands of pre-monarchic Israel (Meyers 2002b:17).<sup>468</sup> As part of their survival strategy for a continued existence, weaving, for instance, became a (productive) skill that not only met certain household demands (for clothing, bed

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<sup>467</sup> However, based on Exodus 35:30-35, the Israelites became skilled weavers in the desert, perhaps adapting only their weaving techniques to later complement Canaanite methods (when they encountered the Canaanites and settled down amongst them in Canaan) or to develop a unique Israelite weaving style. Unger (1988d) comments that it was the men who had knowledge of the art and finer points of embroidery and who were the weavers of fine linen. Based on Exodus 35:30-35, it appears that both genders were taught all things pertaining to weaving and needlework. There is no doubt in my mind that because weaving and needlework were seen as feminine tasks by the community, women knew and understood the art of both. Women knew the art of weaving as well as any man and apparently became sought-after traders in linen garments (cf Pr 31). Also, whatever skills they lacked in weaving and dyeing they might have learned from Canaanite women such as Rahab and the women in her household who were assimilated into the Israelite culture (cf Jos 6:25).

<sup>468</sup> Meyers (2002b:17), referring to Polanyi (1944:53), states that 'people produce for their own sake and/or for that of the group(s) to which they belong'. Thus, the (productive) needs of the Israelite society, the demand for clothing for instance, was turned into an economic activity that benefitted not only the individual households but also larger communities (cf Jdg 14:12-13).

coverings,<sup>469</sup> baskets, for example), but also served the broader Israelite society of Iron Age I in its redistribution and exchange mode of economy (Meyers 2002b:30).

Animals and plants supplied the (Iron I) households with wool and fibre for cloth-making. These together with minerals provided sources for natural dyes (Bulbach 1989:3). As with cooking and bread-making, the technology and tools, processes and expertise of weaving and spinning were left in the hands of the women of the household even though men were weavers as well (Pr 31:13, 19; Wright 1985:31;<sup>470</sup> Borowski 2003:32; Ackerman 2008b:1-2; Ebeling 2009:385; Dever 2012:165-166).<sup>471</sup> This was probably due in part to geographical and climatic conditions of the highlands requiring men to work long and laborious shifts in the environment outside their houses. Considered a virtue also, women through weaving and spinning provided clothes for their households and sustained the family by selling the products of their weaving endeavours (Pr 31:24).

There are various ways in which the mother of Micah might have acquired her wealth in Judges 17:1-5. It is possible that analogous to the mother of Samson who obtains

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<sup>469</sup> Cf Proverbs 31:22. Presumably bed sheets were part of a young girl's bridal trousseau and possibly counted as an economic contribution (in the form of a commodity that could be traded in times of financial constraints) to the household of the future bride and her future husband. Ackerman (2008b:1) recounts how in an ancient Sumerian poem the goddess Inanna is 'required' to produce bed linen for her wedding bed. De Vaux (1997:27) mentions another form of financial contribution – an amount of money paid to the bride's family, some of which may have gone towards the bride's trousseau as is still the custom with modern Arab-Palestinians and in Saudi Arabia.

<sup>470</sup> Wright (1985:311) opines 'not all households necessarily possessed looms and wove their own cloth.' Therefore, cloth had to be acquired (or vice versa) through the exchange and barter system that existed in the early Israelite economy (cf the apocryphal Book of Tobit 2:12). I believe that though a market economy such as the one existing in the western world was absent in ancient Israel (cf Nam 2014), markets in the main cities such as Shiloh, where the Tabernacle was housed, might have been present. Deuteronomy 13:22-26 and Proverbs 31 indicate markets where goods such as clothing, for example, could be acquired during the tri-monthly festival pilgrimages to Shiloh. A precedent for Israelite women engaging in commercial activities at market can be found in the ancient Philistine city of Ashkelon.

As mentioned earlier, King and Stager (2001:191) note that markets were uncovered in this old city (cf Jdg 1:19). I do not think that it would have been uncommon for Philistine women to engage in the selling and buying of goods, and particularly articles their households were much in need of. Women in the pre-monarchic period, whether Israelite or Canaanite, would have been proud to display products made by their own hands (at public markets) and to earn an income from it (cf also Pr 31:18). Wright (1985:311) thinks looms were only present in certain households because of the expense of getting one. However, I believe that with the money the women might have earned at the markets in Shiloh and other places that had sanctuaries, such as Shechem, the women could then buy their own looms. In my opinion, owning their looms increased their income and gave them more financial independence and authority in their households.

<sup>471</sup> Bulbach (1989:2) labels textile industry as the second largest industry after food production in ancient Mesopotamia. He describes 'the economic and technological impact' of the ancient Near Eastern textile industry on modern times.

her influence through motherhood and, though there is no evidence for it, possible weaving as well, the mother of Micah might have elevated her standing in society by similar means.

#### 5.8.2.2 *The weaver's craft at Tell Beit Mirsim*

Wright calls the 'weaver's trade ... the most convenient for carrying on domestically' since a loom could be positioned in any room in a house where it was possible for (women) weavers to function within a cottage industry system.<sup>472</sup> Wright (1985:311) also mentions a multitude of loom weights discovered in the courtyards of houses at Tell Beit Mirsim (Biblical Debir/Kiriath Sepher, which means the village of scribes or books, taken over by the Israelites in Judges 1:11-13) that point towards a 'household craft' – weaving – operated by a family. These household-operated crafts at Tell Beit Mirsim would later develop into a separate and fully functioning national system of trade (Hirsch & Benzinger 1906b). The numerous vat installations for cloth dyeing (6-7 installations) and the great number of loom weights led Albright to conclude that the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC Tell Beit Mirsim housed a guild of weavers and dyers (Israel 2015; cf Albright 1943b; Kuntz 1974:162; Wright 1985:311; Jamieson-Drake 1991:131).

The presence of doughnut-shaped loom weights next to stone pillars (cf Albright 1943b:56, Plate 5; Davian 2003:327) as well as the holes in the arrises of the pillars led Albright to propose that vertical looms were positioned in the courtyards of the four-room houses at Tell Beit Mirsim (Wright 1985:311).

Because of the location of the loom weights at Tell Beit Mirsim in women's specific household spaces as well as their abundance and the allocation of weaving as a woman's job, it can be deduced that it was most likely women from several households who were involved in the craft. Meyers describes the existence of 'informal alliances' formed by

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<sup>472</sup> The abundance of linen clothing mentioned in Judges 14:3 may indicate a pre-monarchic type of weaver's 'cottage' industry in the households of that period. Gugliotto (2000:113) reports that (the pre-monarchic) women did their own spinning and weaving at home, which later became home shops that led to a specialised and industrialised industry (see also 5.8.2.1; 5.8.2.2; 5.8.2.3; 5.8.3.1). Weaving shops in the ancient Near East date back to pre-Sargonic times in Mesopotamia where administrative texts list slaves attached to these establishments (Walton, Matthews & Chavalas 2000b:765) Since weaving was a women's specific task, the women of the household wove the cloth from which they made '...all the family's clothing, bedding and floor coverings ...' (cf 5.8.2.1; 5.8.2.2; 5.8.2.3; 5.8.3.1; Dever 2005:27).

women of several households<sup>473</sup> (Meyers 2002b:32; Meyers 2006:249) which adds weight to the possibility of the presence of (a family-based guild of) professional (women) weavers.<sup>474</sup> De Vaux (1997:77-78) describes these family-based guilds of workers and tradesmen. In my opinion, it is also possible that guilds consisting of tradeswomen where the heads of these were the matriarchs of households may have existed in the pre-monarchic period and after the Exile (cf Jdg16:13-14; cf Tobit 2:11).

As mentioned before, at Kiriath Sepher/Debir (Tell Beit Mirsim) the thriving weaving and dyeing industry was probably inherited from the Canaanites when Debir was taken over by Othniel in Judges 1. Yarn was dyed in cold vats before weaving. At Debir evidence of these vats dated between the 8<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> centuries BC were found (Fletcher 1997).

Israelite dyers used Tyrian murex shells for purple, red hues and vegetable dyes (Unger 1988e; 1988a) to tint cloth.<sup>475</sup> As mentioned before, women's control of domestic processes led to their knowledge of vegetable matter that produced certain dyes. Dyes were also derived from animals and minerals (Bulbach 1989:3). The women would have known that pomegranate bark provides black dyes, almond leaves produce yellow and potash, lime and grape treacle deliver indigo colours, for example (Unger 1988a).

They probably also used the kermes insect for red purple dyes and to produce green cloth they first dipped it in indigo and then yellow dye (Bulbach 1989:3). The process of dyeing also required women to possess certain information and skills such as knowing that natural dyes do not stick directly to the (protein) threads of wools. They first had to treat the wools with metallic salts such as alum. These salts would then allow the dyes to be conferred to the fibres (Bulbach 1989:3).

At Tell Beit Mirsim,<sup>476</sup> excavations of dye vats and loom weights indicate that weaving was a thriving commercial activity in which women probably participated for the reasons mentioned above and because of their intimate knowledge of food items (that is

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<sup>473</sup> That women worked in groups (spinning thread) is evident in a 2000 BC plaque from Mari (Clayton 2014a). Further support for women working in groups comes from a shell plaque, possibly from the Dagan Temple at Mari, showing women weaving (Crawford 2014:19).

<sup>474</sup> De Vaux (1997:77) points out that the craftsmen (or craftswomen) working together led to the formation of guilds, particularly after the Exile, founded on the organisation of family into a clan (*mišpāhā*, or the extended family; cf Meyers 1997a:37, 39; Faust 2000:29-30; Borowski 2003:22).

<sup>475</sup> Cf Unger (1988e) for a fuller description of Tyrian purple dye, source and method.

<sup>476</sup> Cf Albright's (1926:2-14) account of the excavations at Tell Beit Mirsim and his identification of it as Biblical Debir/Kiriath Sepher (Jos15:15). Other scholars, however, have suggested alternative identifications. Na'man (2005:329) lists several of these scholars.

vegetables and fruits) and processes that yielded dyes for cloth (De Vaux 1997:77; Unger 1988a).

As mentioned above, according to the Book of Judges (Jdg 1:11-12), Debir (Kiriath Sepher) was taken over by the Israelites. Excavations of Tel Beit Mirsim reveal weaving and dyeing industries were undertaken in the Debir (Kardara 1961:262-263; De Vaux 1997:77; cf Shamir 1996:140). Textile instruments uncovered at Megiddo (conquered in 732 BC by the king of Assyria Tiglath-Pileser III) suggest cloth manufacturing for production that contributed towards the Assyrian tax system. Frymer-Kensky (2013) comments that the textiles were produced at home. These weaving tasks, I believe, were performed by women since weaving was considered a women's specific duty. We find an analogy of weaving as a task specific to women in the weaving activities of women in ancient Babylonia (Mendelsohn 1943:26).

In my opinion, these textile productions in the Iron Age II may date back to the pre-monarchic period where women undertook weaving tasks in their villages on their farms (and that may be referred to in Judges 14:12; 16:13-14). Since weaving and weeding *inter alia* were considered tasks which were performed by women (only), women's contributions to their household's survival would have been valued by their menfolk.

#### *5.8.2.3 The economic impact*

Apparently, the pre-monarchic woman had the technical knowledge and expert skill of textile production as well as the business acumen in the craft that underwrote the development of a thriving textile industry in later periods of Israelite history (Bulbach 1989:1).

Women's weaving activities undoubtedly made certain families quite well to do as demonstrated by Samson's possession of thirty linen wraps and thirty changes of clothes in Judges 14:12-13. The quantity of Samson's apparel may also be indicative of a household textile workshop under the control of women. The abundance of Samson's clothing, which would have exceeded personal demand, could be an example of a lucrative manufacture of textiles in the proto-Israelite households. These households produced a surplus of weaving products which were intended for luxury use, redistribution, exchange



and trade. Consequently, (a nascent) textile industry that later ‘accelerated trade and generated capital for economic growth ...’ was in the hands of women (Bulbach 1989:2).

In view of the circa 200 BC book of Tobit, it is possible that early Israelite women from poorer households were hired to produce cloth for richer families and could in this way earn an income (Tobit 2:12; Clayton 2014a). Subsequently, weaving can be viewed as an economic activity of the women of a household that prevented familial impoverishment. In this manner the women of the proto-Israelite society could sidestep incurring further stress on an ailing economic and political system that was characteristic of the period of the Judges.<sup>477</sup> In addition, Oppenheim (1949:172) and Zawadzki (2006:74-79) mention that the weaving of liturgical vestments for priest (and priestesses) as well as sacred garments for the statues of the gods and goddesses was probably a profitable business for women that was beneficial to their households (Boertien 2014:150, 153; Ackerman 2008b:14-16; see 5.8.3.1).<sup>478</sup>

### **5.8.3 Weaving and woman’s authority**

Like their Egyptian counterparts, Israelite society probably viewed weaving as a decidedly esteemed and perhaps sought-after skill. As a result, weaving was not only financially valuable to a household, but it also came with a great deal of respect from their households and communities for the women weavers.<sup>479</sup> Already experts at baking and having acquired authority through their knowledge and management of cooking and control of the dietary laws (Geffen 2007:658), their control of domestic textile production presumably had similar consequences for women.<sup>480</sup>

Information that concerned the selection of fibres, cleaning, spinning, weaving processes and all other affairs involved in the manufacture of garments and other weaving items was passed on from one generation of women to the next (Geffen 2007:658). This

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<sup>477</sup> It seems that Tobit, having gone blind, was unable to provide for his family and therefore his wife had to hire out her services as a weaver to keep the family from destitution (Tobit 2:10-11).

<sup>478</sup> Cf Boertien (2014:150-153) who finds links between looms and cults by means of the archaeological evidence and the workshops of women weaving garments for Asherah in the temple.

<sup>479</sup> Weaving was so highly regarded and praised in ancient Egypt that expert Egyptian (women) weavers could be remunerated for their work in gold (Hill 2010).

<sup>480</sup> According to Deuteronomy 22:11, the Israelites were forbidden to wear clothing made of a combination of wool and linen. Once again, it was the women of the household under whose management this divine decree was carried out.

must have contributed to female authority as household and communities were dependent on their knowledge of the weaving arts and production. Furthermore, as women were responsible for ensuring that the dietary laws were upheld, women too ensured that the prohibition laws against wearing clothing made with mixed fibres were carried out.

The women in the pre-monarchic period, displayed the versatility and authority of women who possessed skills and knowledge that not only included working in the field, but also that of weaving, the ordinary and secular domestic processes and the sacred (cf Jdg 4-5; 4:19; 13:9, 23; 14:12-13).

#### *5.8.3.1 The power structures in pre-monarchic households*

Three types of power structures underlined the authority of women as befitting early agrarian households. Meyers (2002b:30-31) posits that they were gained from firstly ‘female control of complex [household] technologies’, secondly ‘power related to ... personal power or valued sense of self ... contingent upon the importance of a set of tasks’ and thirdly ‘socio-political power which transcends individual households’. The last type of power, according to Meyers, is derived from women from various households assembling to participate in tasks.<sup>481</sup> In addition, female authority could also have been based on the reputation of good weavers who were well known for their quality work and were presumably sought after (cf Pr 31:24).<sup>482</sup> Naturally, there would have also been a demand for women weavers for the priestly vestments and management and reparation of the curtains and hanging in the Tabernacle at Shiloh. Studies of women in the ancient Near East reveal that women were ‘ritual weavers’ (Baccalli et al 2014:114). Weaving as a sacred occupation<sup>483</sup> would also have garnered much authority and an income for women

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<sup>481</sup> Meyers (2002b:30-31) gives a discussion of these three types of female power – that is: female power derived from their control of domestic technologies, power that comes from the successful accomplishment of tasks and socio-political power outside the domestic sphere.

<sup>482</sup> In 1 Samuel 28, the witch of Endor was well known for her prophetic skills. Likewise, women with skills in baking and weaving would have been renowned and probably did not lack clientele. An analogy is to be found in ‘the textile production of Aššur during the Old Assyrian period [that] was based on the labor of women who actually spun and wove in their own homes’. That a market existed requiring the services of skilled and well-known women weavers is evident in the letter of the merchant Pazur-Aššur to the weaver lady Waqqurtum in which he instructs her on inter alia the style and size of her textiles as were required by market demands (Baccalli et al 2014:106).

<sup>483</sup> In ancient Egypt weaving was associated with the goddess Neith (Hill 2010). Baccalli et al (2014:114) mention the ‘Hattian goddesses of fate [Gulšeš]’ who ‘spins in the underworld’. Women weaving for Asherah

who produced the required textile materials in their homes or within cultic compounds (Ackerman 2008b:18).<sup>484</sup>

#### 5.8.4 The symbolism of weaving

Colonisation of the highlands, experiencing the isolation from the more ‘advanced’ urban areas and access to ready-made commodities such as clothing must have ensured that women rapidly acquired weaving and spinning skills to supply the demands of their households. Textile materials and weaving activities are mentioned in the book of Judges (Jdg 5:30; 16:12-14). The narratives indicate that women from all classes and stations knew how to weave (cf Jdg 16:12-14)<sup>485</sup> and presumably were familiar with the economic value of textile production (cf Jdg 5:30).

A relief dated to 1000 BC Susa (modern day Iraq) depicts a noble woman spinning thread (see Figure 5.21; Clayton 2014a), while ancient Near Eastern documents record women of lesser status producing textiles for the royal families and their staff as well as supplying the armed forces (Breniquet & Michel 2014:8).<sup>486</sup> The presence of a loom in Delilah’s house was probably as much a symbol of her femininity as it might have been a source of income. The spindle and distaff were deeply rooted in a women’s femininity and deftly counterbalanced the bow and arrow as male symbols (Botterweck & Ringgren [eds] 1986:124; Baccalli et al 2014:114; cf Ackerman 2008b:2; Breniquet & Michel 2014:3). Therefore, it is possible that most women including Delilah knew how to weave as it

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are also indicated by texts such as 2 Kings 23:7 (cf Mckinlay 2004:3; Dever 2005:213; Scham 2005; Ackerman 2008b:1-30).

<sup>484</sup> King and Stager (2001:157) state that finds of sixty ceramic loom weights, 140 sheep astragali and a spindle whorl indicate that spinning and weaving occurred near the cultic centre at 10<sup>th</sup> century BC Tanaach. The Book of Tobit (2:11) indicates that women were hired as weavers for other families. Therefore, it is possible that women could have been involved in textile production outside their homes on an industrial scale. Clayton (2014a) comments that in ancient Mesopotamia the impoverishment of families resulted in women having to work in influential estates.

<sup>485</sup> Jael’s skill, confidence and precision handling a tent peg and hammer might also have stemmed from her accuracy acquired in using a loom. According to Bullinger (1922c), it was the women who put up and took down tents, which account for Jael’s dexterity in using the tent peg and hammer. (Also, cf Coffman 1999b; Pett 2013b.)

<sup>486</sup> For example, Breniquet and Michel (2014:8) mention the circa 13<sup>th</sup> century BC presumably non-royal household of Babu-aha-iddina at Aššur employed ‘dependent’ female workers in the production of textiles. Cf also Wright (1996:91) describing the women who worked as weavers during the Ur III epoch. ‘Potts (1997:94) also mentions the large numbers of women employed as weavers at Lagash during the period of Ur III (cf also Marsman 2003:408-409).

formed such an essential part of their womanhood (cf Pr 31:19; Marx 2013:38-39) as well as serving as an economic endowment<sup>487</sup> in their households.



Figure 5.21 Women weavers (Cylinder seal impression dated to 4000 BC Susa [<http://www.ancientfigurines.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Susa-seal-women-weaving.jpg>])

The spindle and distaff (see Figure 5.21 and Figure 5.22) thus had a two-fold symbolism. They were ‘symbols of textile economic activities’ and emphasised ‘the most important role of females: the creation of life’ (Baccali et al 2014:117).<sup>488</sup> Women in creating and birthing life, whether at the loom or at a birthing stool, needed assistance. Therefore, it would not have been uncommon for more skilled and experienced matriarchs such as the mothers of Micah and Samson, Deborah, the mother of Sisera to oversee the weaving and spinning activities by younger women in their households, for example Achsah. Meyers (2002b:32-33; 2006:247-251), as previously mentioned, suggests networks of women working together in an organised system of domestic tasks. In such a female group, knowledge and training was passed on to younger and less experienced members. More mature female members were the leaders but did not dominate the other members. The filtration of knowledge in the weaving arts would have spread to all the women in a household. The economic and femininity aspects adherent to the craft would have ensured that women from all ranks participated in it.

<sup>487</sup> A new bride probably took to her new household her loom, spindle and cloth or was given these as gifts (the *mohar* or bride price) by the groom (cf Ex 24:53).

<sup>488</sup> Baccalli et al (2014:117) describe the distaff and spindle as emblems of femininity with specific reference to the Hittite society. The authors also mention mirrors in conjunction with the distaff and spindle as the three signs of womanhood. They refer to the yarn as a symbol of the thread of life and connect this with the idea that ancient Mesopotamian society viewed women as creating thread and therefore also life ‘in all aspects’. Trinkl (2014:202) also comments on wool working and its tools as not only useful to ancient Greek society, but also as markers of femininity in that culture.



Figure 5.22 The spinner. Young woman holding distaff and spinning. A servant or slave is holding a fan behind her [8th-6th century BC-Susa] (<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/2251868535412600/>)

### 5.8.5 Needles, spindles and loom weights

#### 5.8.5.1 Sewing needles

Evidence of women's participation in (household and industrial) weaving activities can be found among the material remains designated as feminine all over ancient Israel. Loom weights (see 5.8.5.3), spindles whorls and needles have been uncovered together with women's equipment such as cooking vessels, installations and cultic artefacts in houses at Iron Age II Lachish, Tell el-Far'ah, Beersheba, Tell Masos and Tell Halif (Willett 2001; Dever 2012:165).

Needles had a 'hole or loop near one end of the tool' through which thread was drawn for sewing purposes. Fibula, serving as sewing needles that were used in place of needles during the Iron Ages, resembled toggle pins in their shape. At Megiddo, the bronze needles discovered were typical of the Bronze Age and almost indistinguishable from toggle pins. A bronze needle was also found at Tall Dayr 'Alla (Daviau et al 2002:201).

#### 5.8.5.2 Spindles

Spindles made of metal, bone and ivory have been discovered, but more frequently archaeologists uncovered spindles made of wood. Spindles were narrow rods on which women wound thread during the spinning procedure (Ebeling 2010:57). Forbes (1964:154) relates that undecorated spindles were found at Tell Jawa in Jordan, Hazor, Megiddo and Tell el-'Orēme, while decorated spindles were unearthed at Beth Shan, Ugarit, Tell Jawa, Jerusalem and Megiddo (Daviau et al 2002:180). Daviau et al (2002:180-183) provide

details of the decorated and undecorated spindles found at Tell Jawa in Jordan and their parallels at other sites in Israel. The authors note that spindles have one rounded end and the other tapered. When both ends are broken off, identifying the artefact as a spindle and not as a bone pin or wand is difficult. Ceramic spindle whorls were found at Megiddo, Beth Shan, Tell Keisan, Hazor, Lachish, Tell el-Far'ah and Tell el-'Umayri, amongst others. In the Iron Age, women spinners used ceramic spindle whorls as weights to hold the spindle down at one end.<sup>489</sup> They had a hole in the centre and could be made of wood, glass, bone, ceramic, stone, metal or, common in the Late Bronze Age, ivory (Daviau et al 2002:183-184).<sup>490</sup> Pritchard (1985:72) relates that spindles were also found at Tell es-Sa'idīyeh and 'Ain Dara (Albertz & Schmitt 2012:58, 213).<sup>491</sup>

#### 5.8.5.3 *Loom weights*

Ring shaped, doughnut shaped, cylindrical and anchor shaped loom weights made of clay, stone or ceramic are often found in situ or in (storage) groups (see Figure 5.23; Daviau et al 2002:191-197).<sup>492</sup> At Beersheba, many loom weights were discovered together with grindstones, designating this area as a women's working space where weaving and spinning activities occurred (Singer-Avitz 2011:285-286, 292). Kelm and Mazar (1995:162-3) recount that the women would have used 'a vertical warp-weighted loom' (cf Figure 5.23) as suggested by evidence from Tel Batash, Tanaach, Tall as-Sa'idīyah, for example (Pritchard 1985:36; Friend 1998:2-4; Daviau et al 2002:191). Wooden looms have also been found together with vats for dyeing cloth at Lachish (Unger 1988d).

At Beth Shemesh, circular stone vats with loom weights indicating the manufacture and dying of textiles were uncovered and at Tel Masos looms were also found (Albertz & Schmitt 2012:93, 125). The loom used by Delilah to weave Samson's hair in Judges 16:13 was possibly a horizontal loom. According to Cooke (1913:151), this type of loom would

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<sup>489</sup> Daviau et al (2002:184) comment that Albright (1938:55-56) proposed the replacement of ivory spindle whorls with ceramic whorls in the early Iron Age.

<sup>490</sup> Cf Daviau et al (2002:183-191) for a more complete list of the various spindles whorls, their sizes, shapes and sites they were found at.

<sup>491</sup> Cf Cahill (2006:441), Panitz-Cohen (2011:89, 91, 93), Brody (2011:246, 250), Singer-Avitz (2011:290, 293) and Herrmann (2011:319) for other locations in Israel where spindles were found.

<sup>492</sup> Wooden looms are very rarely preserved in the archaeological record. The presence of looms, however, can be located by means of loom weights which would have been near them (cf Daviau et al 2002:191; Ebeling 2010:57-58; Dever 2012:165).

have facilitated weaving ‘the hair of a person lying asleep upon the floor into the warp, i.e. the horizontal threads which are intersected at right angles by the weft in this case Samson’s hair’.<sup>493</sup>



Figure 5.23 Vertical loom. Warp-weighted (vertical) loom [ca 8<sup>th</sup> century BC- reconstruction]  
([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Four\\_room\\_house](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Four_room_house))

## 5.8.5 Textile production processes

### 5.8.5.1 Looms

Of the two types of looms utilised – horizontal and vertical looms – the abundant numbers of clay loom weights found indicate the vertical loom was more commonly used by women during the Iron Ages (Wight 1953; Hunting 2006:17-19). The vertical loom consisted of a crossbeam propped up by two straight beams. One can imagine the intrepid and industrious women of the Hill Country making their own rudimentary looms from wood carefully selected for their strength.

They fashioned sewing needles from broken pieces of bone through which they pierced a hold at one end (Wight 1953; Hunting 2006:17-19). The warp strings were attached to the crossbeams at one end and held rigid by loom weights at the other end. Textiles were made from wool and flax though sheep wool was preferred. It appears that spinning and weaving occurred in the same place as evidenced by the spindle whorls found at sites (Borowski 2003:31-32). Spinning was generally an easy task, but new female

<sup>493</sup> Vertical looms, however, were more commonly used in the Iron Age (Daviau et al 2002:191). King and Stager (2001:157) cite Judges 16:13 as describing the weaving process and they contend the type of loom used by Delilah was a vertical one. Patch (1938b), however, agrees with Cooke (1913:151) that a horizontal loom was used.

spinners needed training before becoming adept at it. The process of weaving, on the other hand, was a complicated, time-consuming task that required great technical skill and knowledge (Hunting 2006:17-19; Ebeling 2010:57).

#### *5.8.5.2 Spinning*

In ancient times, as in the present, women preferred strong fibres and thus selected and sorted wool fibres according to their qualities. The wool was then washed with water and carded to remove debris and knots to line up the fibres in anticipation of the spinning process (Barber 1994:35-36). The fibres of flax, on the other hand, needed retting, for example, saturation of the stalks in water to detach the utilisable thread (Bulbach 1989:2; Ebeling 2010:57).<sup>494</sup> The spinner woman held a bundle of wool in her one hand or used a distaff (held in her left hand) on which end a bunch of wool was hooked (Patch 1938c). With her right hand, she drew the wool onto a spindle that twisted and then wound the thread (Patch 1938c). The spinner rotated the spindle with her hand while the spinning motion was given momentum by means of a spindle whorl – a weight attached to the bottom of the spindle.<sup>495</sup> In this way, the wool was twisted onto the spindle to form the thread (Bulbach 1989:2; Barber 1994:36-39; King & Stager 2001:152-153; Hunting 2006:52; Ebeling 2010:57).<sup>496</sup> When the spring shearing was completed, spinning could be done at any time ‘and until the supply of wool ran out’ (Ebeling 2010:58).

#### *5.8.5.3 Weaving*

Weaving involved the interlacing of the warp (vertical) threads and the weft (horizontal) threads at right angles to each other (Barber 1994:39; Ebeling 2010:57). The women weavers held the warp threads under tension by stretching them on a loom. The weft was then passed through them (Ebeling 2010:57; King & Stager 2001:153). As mentioned before, it is most probable that the proto-Israelite women would have preferred the vertical

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<sup>494</sup> King and Stager (2001:149-150) expand on the retting process as well as the uses, types and qualities of linen. The production of linen ‘was a prominent industry in ancient Palestine’ according to King and Stager who refer to the ‘families of the linen factory’ in 1 Chronicles 4:21.

<sup>495</sup> Barber (1994:37-38) comments that ancient whorls were commonly made of clay. A rock, however, or a fruit or vegetable could be used as well. In this way, women could fashion their own make-shift spindle whorls.

<sup>496</sup> Dever (2012:165) notes that the method of using one hand to hold the wool and the other to draw it out and onto a spindle is still the practice among the villagers in Levantine cultures (cf Patch 1938c).



loom. The vertical loom was portable and easily set up in a courtyard or inside a house and therefore weaving could be carried out under different weather conditions (King & Stager 2001:153-154; Ebeling 2010:58). Evidence for the horizontal loom comes from ancient Egypt. Artwork depicting weaving workshops from the tomb of Meketre (circa 2055-1650 BC) shows the weavers using horizontal looms (Barber 1994:80-81; Ebeling 2010:38). At Iron Age Tel Batash, however, loom weights found indicate vertical looms used in the household weaving craft (King & Stager 2001:154).<sup>497</sup> The vertical loom also facilitated the weaving process as the women could sit or stand in front of the loom while weaving from top to bottom instead of hunching, as was the case with weaving on the horizontal loom (Fletcher 1997).

#### *5.8.5.4 Final stages*

When the weaving was finally done, the warp was removed from the loom. The ends of threads draping from finished cloth were knotted into fringes to prevent unravelling (Fletcher 1997). The women degreased the cloth, scoured it to remove impurities, cleaned it by washing it in water, and then smoothed it (Wright 1985:311).

### 5.9 CONCLUSION

It has been determined that the economic contributions by women to the pre-monarchic household economy probably granted women a substantial amount of power and status. Men and women had separate and distinct roles in their households and within the public sphere. Interactions between men and women were largely determined by religious, economic and cultural concepts (Simkins 2000:62; Hauptman 2001:1356-1359). These interactions seem to have been based on respect and equal worth and seem to have fit the ideal of YHWH for men and women under His Kingship (cf Jdg 1:14-15; 4-5; 14:2-3; 17:1-4).

Women's power in the domestic sphere was apparently equal to male power albeit in a different form despite the dominant cultural ideology. Women's authority was derived from a variety of women's specific tasks including their reproductive

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<sup>497</sup> Shamir (2005:99-152) provides information on textiles regarding spinning and weaving techniques at Mo'a (Moje Awad), which is dated to the Roman period and probably inherited from previous eras.

tasks. The (economic) dimensions of the four-room house, which was the favoured dwelling of the proto-Israelite, seemed to be conducive to the psychological and cosmological health of the residents. It was within the four-room house and its surrounding environs that the importance of the *bêt ĕm* seemed to acquire a greater significance. Women through their specific skills, abilities and roles acquired a great deal of autonomy, status and authority that could provide their households all they needed to survive. They could provide their families with an almost near normal stability and routine because they were able to execute certain household chores in a variety of places (Ebeling 2010:50). Women were mostly the spinners and weavers in their households. The Old Testament (cf Jdg 16:13-14), particularly the wisdom literature, allowed women the responsibility of cloth-making and providing for their families through their textile producing and trading endeavours (Willett 2001). As weavers, women could achieve a great deal of authority and status. Their skill and technological know-how of the weaving, baking and other women's specific tasks, processes and tools were transmitted from one generation of women to the next. This ensured that weaving women remained in control of the economic processes in their households.

Children were the lifeblood of a family and its economic survival. As such, marriage and childbearing were of prime importance to Israelite women. Motherhood increased a woman's status in her household and society. Sons were preferred for property and inheritance rights. Still, daughters could inherit the estate in the absence of sons. There were other means by which barren women could enhance their status in the household but, for women, having children and motherhood provided them with automatic authority and power status. Apparently, women were always at work and always accompanied by relatives. One cannot avoid the observation that any moment of privacy must have been greatly valued.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **SHAME AND ABUSE IN THE BOOK OF JUDGES AND TODAY**

#### **6.1 INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter, those women who lived on the fringes of society, those who were considered dishonoured, will be discussed. In the narratives of the Book of Judges the harlot such as Delilah played a definite role in the history of pre-monarchic Israel. Consequently, I will investigate the roles and status of harlots within the dominant cultural ideology (see 1.1.1-1.1.1.3 a, b, c, d; 2.3.2.1a, b; 2.3.3.1; 2.4.1.1a, b, c, d, e) of the pre-monarchic period.

In Judges 19, the reader encounters a disturbing narrative in which an almost unmentionable crime occurs: the rape and death of a concubine. I will examine how such a terrible situation occurred in the Book of Judges. Subsequently, the roles and status of the concubine in early Israel will be explored. The rape of the concubine as a purported consequence of abusive patriarchy will be looked at.

I have selected the words ‘beyond shame’ as a title for the segments on harlotry (see 6.2.1-6.2.4). My motive was to look at women such as Delilah in Judges 16 and see further than the disgrace and dishonour associated with the position of harlots in the community. Similarly, with the words ‘beyond abuse’ as a title for the segment on the concubines (see 6.3-6.3.4.3), I wish to elevate the concubine to a place of value and worth as I focus on the maltreatment of women in the Book of Judges and in the modern world. Consequently, in my choices for these titles ‘beyond shame’ and ‘beyond abuse’, I want to express the idea that YHWH did not intend women to occupy ‘minor and subordinate’ roles (see Bird 1992:951). The values and principles of equality in the covenant were extended to all despite the life choices of some women and despite the social status of the concubine in the dominant cultural ideology.

#### **6.2 BEYOND SHAME**

##### **6.2.1 Harlotry**

###### *6.2.1.1 Introduction*

Ipsen (2006:60) defines prostitution as essentially ‘to trade sex for money or material goods’ (cf Bird 1989:120; Davidson 2011:446). The term *zonah* – translated as prostitute<sup>498</sup> (used for the woman in Judges 16:1) – ‘refers to a woman who engages in sexual relationship outside of a formal union’ (Bird 1989:120; Marsman 2003:431-432; Berlin 2008:63; cf Easton 1997b).

In the Book of Judges, two prominent male figures are associated with harlotry. Jephthah is the illegitimate son of Gilead and a prostitute. For this reason, he is deprived of an inheritance by the legitimate children of his father (Jdg 11:2; Niditch 2001:184; Fishbane 2002:175). Another individual, Samson, had sexual relations with prostitutes, one relationship in particular that led to his downfall (Jdg 16:1, 4; Niditch 2001:187).

Despite these negative associations with harlots (inter alia low status [Jephthah’s mother] and treachery [Delilah]), prostitution, although also immoral, was apparently tolerated in the Israelite community. Harlotry was permitted if the women involved were widows, orphans or aliens. A woman who was a widow, an orphan or an alien was designated to an independent (outside the authority of her families) status and therefore not under the authority of a husband, a father or a brother (Ipsen 2006:60; cf Nelson 1996; Berlin 2008:63). While it was allowed for ancient Near Eastern people to sell their daughters into prostitution and servitude, Israelite fathers were forbidden to adopt these practices (Lv 19:29; Nelson 1996; Grabbe 2001:103).

Berlin (2008:63) comments that in the story of Dinah’s rape,<sup>499</sup> her brothers remarked that she had been treated like a prostitute (*zonah*) (cf Longman 2014:106). It appears that the brothers considered Dina’s rape to have been not only a violation of her, but also a violation of kinship relations (Japinga 2017:41; cf Longman 2014:106). But, says Berlin, ‘the issue was not sexual looseness [or rather sexual autonomy]<sup>500</sup> or premarital sex per se’ but the familial authority to control (or negotiate the terms and conditions of)

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<sup>498</sup> I will use both words: prostitute and harlot.

<sup>499</sup> Genesis 34:1-31 tells the story of the rape of Dina, Jacob’s daughter, by Shechem son of Hamor, the Hivite (Gn 34:2). Hamor tried to correct the injustice and harm done to Dina by his son by promising ‘proper marriage relations’ (Japinga 2017:41; cf Lane 2010:34). However, the outraged brothers of Dina resorted to trickery to avenge their sister’s mishandling by Shechem (Nowell 1997:41-42).

<sup>500</sup> I prefer to use the term ‘sexual autonomy’. In my opinion, the term ‘loose’ is almost always used in terms of women and not of men whereas in the Bible this is not the case.

marriages (cf Ex 34:8-17; Jdg 14:1-5; cf Frymer-Kensky 1996:404).<sup>501</sup> From this statement we may gather that harlotry would have been frowned upon when it placed women (who were not orphans, widows or aliens) outside familial jurisdiction to negotiate a marriage contract for them.

According to Kohler and Guttmacher (1906), a father had authority over his daughter until she reached puberty. O'Brien (2008:134) notes that the father's authority extended over her marriage as well. Tsumura (2003:72) comments that while children were understood to be the father's property, this did not usually allow fathers the liberty of controlling the life and death of their offspring. Copan (2011:107) observes that according to Exodus 20:12, 'children are commanded to honour their mother equal to their father'. Hence, a mother 'was to have equal authority over her children' (Copan 2011:107; cf Jdg 14:2-5). Therefore, it is possible that while a father might have had authority over a daughter's marriage (O'Brien 2008:134) or the authority to sacrifice her virginity (Tsumura 2003:72), a mother's authority probably presented a more balanced and wholesome authority over daughters. This state of affairs would be more in line with covenantal principles in the pre-monarchy that ascribed equality to both men and women

According to Kohler and Guttmacher (1906), after a daughter's puberty, parental authority took on a form of vigilance until she entered marriage.

It can be imagined that this type of 'independence'<sup>502</sup> might have enabled some young women to be sexually autonomous as well, and even more so in the Book of Judges since the period of the Judges indicates an independence of spirit and actions that bordered on lawlessness (Jdg 17:6; 21:25). In addition, there were no punishments by law for engaging in premarital sex (see Nelson 1996).

Nelson (1996) notes that Leviticus 19:29 and Deuteronomy 22:13-21 may indicate that there were no penalties against a man and a woman who engaged in consensual

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<sup>501</sup> This sounds cold-hearted and shows a total disregard of Dinah's feelings and trauma. Genesis 34:6, however, says that the brothers were filled with grief and fury. These are emotions commonly experienced by family members whose loved ones have suffered and survived the ordeal of rape.

<sup>502</sup> Is this the reason why Dinah could visit the women of the land unaccompanied? (Cf Gn 34:1).

premarital sex. Only in rare cases could the penalty for harlotry be death (cf Dt 22:13-21). A daughter of a priest, for example, could be burned for harlotry.<sup>503</sup>

#### *6.2.1.2 Harlotry and the transmission of knowledge*

Chavalas (2014:3), referring to Frazer (1906:21-24), comments that in the ancient Near East human sexuality was expressed in the need to reproduce, which was established and confirmed in sacred rituals. The sexual act became a type of communication with the gods whereby (Israelite) men engaging with temple prostitutes, for example, hoped to encourage the gods to bless themselves, their land and their animals with fertility (see 4.4.3; 4.5.4). It is possible that from these cultic (sexual) rites, secular harlotry also became a vehicle of communication and thus the human desire for intimacy might also have included the transmission of knowledge for either the advancement of an individual of the community or the defeat of one's enemy (cf Jdg 16).

In the epic of Gilgamesh (ca 2150-1400 BC), Enkidu engages in sexual intercourse with the harlot Shamhat (a temple prostitute) ([insertion mine], Nemet-Nejat 2014b:178). Through this union Enkidu, who previously had been a wild man living a rough life with the animals, was transformed into a civilised man (Nemet-Nejat 2014b:178). It is possible that the transferal of knowledge occurred from 'a civilized or educated' Shamhat to the wild or uncivilised Enkidu and that intercourse may be a metaphor for this transmission.<sup>504</sup>

The myth of Enkidu is an example where sacred prostitution apparently existed beyond the function of securing human fertility and reproduction through sacred rituals. Considering this, harlotry, as mentioned above, therefore had its merits outside of sacred rite.<sup>505</sup> The pre-monarchic people might have approached secular harlotry as more than an

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<sup>503</sup> In the Old Testament, harlotry is categorised as cultic, secular and metaphorical or spiritual. As the spiritual husband of Israel, God condemned idolatrous Israel for prostituting themselves to other gods (Ex 34:15; Nelson 1996; cf Frick 1996:438; Camp 2000:25, 41).

<sup>504</sup> Since Enkidu became best friends with Gilgamesh, who may be a historical figure (Lorey 1997), the story might be a representation of the civilisation of mankind after the flood of Noah (Gn 6).

<sup>505</sup> Drawing upon the myth of Enkidu, apparently there is a complimentary aspect between sacred and secular harlotry. While sacred prostitution existed to secure a household's continued fertility of family members, fields and animals, secular harlotry at times might have existed as a means of advancement in a society. The people involved in the relationship may have possessed important information regarding religion, technology, politics, society and economics, for example, that could have been used to their advantage (cf Jdg 16:5). It was the sharing of ideas and information that was held to be precious. These two categories of prostitution complemented each other. One category focused on the spiritual dimension in enlisting the god's assistance, the other on the physical and human sharing and acquisition of knowledge for progression. Thus, in the myth

indulgence in carnal pleasures and more than solely a means of making a livelihood through the exchange of money (Jdg 16:5). The transmission of knowledge in terms of politics, economics, religion, technology and social behaviour might have played a big role in the relationship with a harlot, and particularly if she was a high-class prostitute who were in possession of a great deal of knowledge.

In contrast to the civilising of a man in the myth, in the Book of Judges sexual intercourse with Delilah becomes the means to destroy the man Samson when the secret of his strength is revealed to the Philistines (Jdg 16:4-21).

The procurement of information may have been a reason why Samson's relationship with Delilah in the Book of Judges was a continuous instead of a singular encounter. The Philistine rulers requested Delilah to discover the secret of Samson's strength and pass the information on to the Philistines. Delilah would be presented with a fortune in silver for her services (Jdg 16:5). Judges 16:4 tells us that Samson fell in love with Delilah.

In Judges 14, Samson's predilection for a certain type of woman, high-born and Philistine, is established. Pett (2013e) considers the woman in Timnah to possibly have been a member of the upper-class as she was part of the ruling class that was the Philistines. Accordingly, Delilah was probably a high-class prostitute (Pett 2013e). She owned her own home and was evidently a woman of means which would account for her connections with the Philistine rulers and the substantial bribe offered to her. Since she was possibly of high birth, Delilah possessed religious knowledge and was probably intelligent as well as part of the high-culture of the upper echelons of Philistine society.<sup>506</sup>

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of Enkidu one finds that the ancients were bound to their animals and fields and were compelled to engage in sacred prostitution to secure not only their own fertility, but also that of their animals and land. With Enkidu, sexual interaction with a harlot liberated him from animal and field and released him from living a primitive life. He was elevated to the status of a civilised man. This type of elevation, in my opinion, comes from the acquisition of knowledge.

<sup>506</sup> It is believed that Delilah was either a harlot or a sexually liberated woman and an Israelite (Pett 2013e). Pett (2013e) notes that the reader of the Book of Judges would have been informed if Delilah was a Philistine. However, Pett (2013e) also comments that as an Israelite Delilah would have known that his long hair identified Samson as being of Nazirite status and therefore would have been aware that his strength was in his hair. Wong (2012) based on the location of Delilah's house in Philistine territory and her association with the Philistine, believes her origins to be Philistine. Delilah was most probably an Israelite as she had a Hebrew name and lived in the valley of Sorek, an area between Israelite and Philistine territory (Jdg 16:4). She had a relationship with Samson outside of marriage. Exum (2009b) describes Delilah as commonly presumed to have been a harlot and a Philistine though none of these assumptions are conclusive. It is possible that her

Samson could indulge his sexual appetite with high-class harlots. But perhaps Samson was also in search of the type of social and cultural environment the Philistine women provided him and which he may have construed as lacking in his own life. Delilah's status in the pre-monarchic period as probably an independent woman living outside familial authority apparently allowed her to select harlotry (possibly from a variety of women's positions) as her role in society. It is possible that her status as a member of a higher social order made her the right choice for Samson who might have been seeking not only love but his own social elevation in the community outside of YHWH's covenantal principles.<sup>507</sup> It is possible that in her initial association with Samson, Delilah because of his strength and leadership as an Israelite judge enjoyed being with a man of that reputation. Later however, she sought information from Samson that could further establish her status in society, enrich her and keep the Philistine rulers at bay.

#### *6.2.1.3 The Israelite 'tolerance' for harlotry*

The Old Testament strongly condemns sacred prostitution (Dt 23:17-18; Pr 6:24-26; Bird 1989:120). Married prostitutes were considered adulteresses – the penalty for which could be death (cf Gn 38:24) – but the men were never portrayed in that light. As mentioned before (cf 6.2.1.1), secular harlotry, however, was tolerated in the Israelite community (Emmerson 1989:388). In the character of Rahab as a hero (Jos 6:17-25), some have come to consider harlots to have been 'accepted members of society' (Bellis 1994:113).

This may explain why the authors/editors of the Book of Judges recount the unfolding events in Judges 16-21 as 'normal' for that time period (cf Jdg 17:6; 21:25). Accordingly, the 'closed and conservative' Israelite society described by Faust (2005:211-212) was apparently extremely tolerant towards the lifestyles and life choices of its members (Bellis 1994:21) as well as the impact of foreign nations on them (cf Jdg 1:19-29, 27-36; 3:5; 8:24-27; 14:2-5; 16:1, 4; 17:4-5). YHWH, however, always condemned it. Apart from the immorality factor, the imparting of (religious) knowledge and its adoption

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status in the community could have been that of a sexually independent woman (see 6.2.1.2), like the Shulamite woman in the Song of Songs or that of a wealthy widow (Exum 2009b; Pett 2013e).

<sup>507</sup> In my opinion, although he did not worship the Canaanite idols, Samson's carnal nature is representative of the carnality of the pre-monarchic Israelite men and women who, in their worship of the Canaanite idols, sought more (the feasts and festivals and carnality of the Canaanite cult [see Chapter Four] in addition to YHWH and His abundant blessings.



through harlotry might also be another reason why fathers were forbidden to sell their daughters into prostitution (Lv 19:29).

### 6.2.2 Harlotry and economics

As in modern times, poverty would naturally have been (another) key motivating force for an Israelite woman (who was utterly disadvantaged, possessing neither money nor trade to support herself) to engage in the oldest profession since time immemorial ([insertions mine], Chavalas 2014:1-2).<sup>508</sup> However, it is unconceivable that Israelite women did not learn to weave and cook as a child, skills that they could use to generate an income when their families fall on hard times (see below). Nevertheless, driven by the economic survival of their family and households, some women may have turned to harlotry. Apparently, in this way women could fulfil the role of providing the family with financial assistance or with whatever commodity she was compensated for her service.

Despite how it was gained, these women in the role of harlot possibly acquired certain financial status and authority in the community. An unmarried woman's status in the community in her role as a harlot, according to Chavalas (2014:1-2), was tolerated (see 6.2.1.1).

However, the profession, though recognised, might not have come without moments of infamy.<sup>509</sup> Though not considered a crime, Feinstein (2014:94) comments that any woman who would profane herself by having sex outside of marriage is polluted<sup>510</sup>. This does not bode well for the status of any woman. Thus, in the preservation and carefulness of her reputation (which was the honour of her family as well), the question why women in the pre-monarchic community would take up the role of harlot (as indicated in the Old Testament) is raised (cf Lv 19:29; Jdg 16).

In a dry and mostly waterless land (the Hill Country) with limited resources, every member in the community had to learn a trade in order to be a productive member of the

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<sup>508</sup> Bird (1989:121), considering Gebhard (1974:26), states that 'prostitution is not a universal phenomenon, nor can it properly claim to be the world's oldest profession'.

<sup>509</sup> That prostitutes and particularly old prostitutes were considered women of a certain colourful reputation is clear in an ancient text of Akkadian wisdom literature: 'My vulva is fine; according to my people, it is used up [or: finished] for me' (Nemet-Nejat 2014a:86).

<sup>510</sup> Cf Feinstein (2014:93-94) for an analysis of the *halalah* women including prostitutes and the daughters of priests who profaned themselves by having 'sex outside of wedlock' in the Israelite culture.

household and community to ensure their economic survival. Therefore, it is also incomprehensible why women would engage in prostitution as an alternative to impoverishment when they had the know-how and skill to produce a stable and respectable income. From the presence of a loom in Delilah's house (Jdg 16:13-14), it can be deduced that Delilah or the women in her household could work as weavers.<sup>511</sup> Why then Delilah's need to prostitute herself?

It becomes fathomable, however, when harlotry was a role for women in the Israelite society that was tolerated and accepted (Emmerson 1989:388). It was possibly a role which women willingly accepted. Since there were no penalties for sex outside of a formal relationship<sup>512</sup>, harlotry was a position in which they could express the sensual side of their nature and perhaps their sexual autonomy. Financial reward could have been an

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<sup>511</sup> Delilah appears to have been well off. From the presence of a loom in her house, it can be inferred that she must have had enough money to afford one. Evidently, she was skilled in the art of weaving. This is an indication that she probably could or did generate an (additional) income as a weaver of textiles. As a skilled weaver, Delilah might have made more money on a regular basis with a well-established clientele instead of being subjected to the financial vagaries, uncertainty and possible physical harm she exposed herself to as a mere harlot.

In my opinion, Delilah might have been a harlot because of:

- the transmission of ideas and knowledge;
- the expression of female sexuality and sexual autonomy;
- a variant form of patriarchy that was tolerant towards woman and their life choices.

In Judges 16:5 the reader may find a good example of a harlot succumbing to greed and bribery. Apart from these factors, it seems that intimidation was also probably a reason why Delilah accepted the Philistine's silver. Judges 16 reveals that more than one Philistine ruler was needed to convince her to betray Samson, and with men constantly hidden in her room (cf Jdg 16:9, 12) she must have felt greatly harassed and in constant fear for her life (cf Jdg 14:6).

If harlotry is evidence of a woman's spiritual, intellectual and moral bankruptcy (Bird 1989:130), what does it indicate about men who had sexual contact with a harlot? Delilah was not condemned for her relationship with Samson, nor does the writer appear to be surprised at her apparent greed and betrayal of Samson. Rather, Samson comes across as a man lusting after foreign women, a man who was breaking covenantal principles. As a Nazirite, he was to follow YHWH and live a life of abstinence.

Samson desired to exert an authority over a woman he did not have a legal or moral right to as demonstrated by his frequent visits. In doing so, Samson 'betrays the vows involved in his status as a nazirite' (Williams 1982:75). It seems that Samson, as the last judge, set the stage for the immorality and wicked choices made by the elders who came after him (cf Jdg 21). Probably fully aware of her working for the Philistines, Samson knowingly put himself in harm's way. YHWH's presence left Samson (Jdg 16:20). He went into captivity (Jdg 16:21). Encompassing the spirit of a free woman of the pre-monarchic period, Delilah, on the other hand, was more in control of her life and destiny than was Samson. She went on to live her life, probably in the liberty of her chosen profession.

<sup>512</sup> Leviticus 20:20 and Deuteronomy 22:20-24 refer to punishments for those stepping outside the bounds of marriage. No specific punishments are mentioned for single people.

added benefit. Harlotry was apparently a life choice that fit in with certain people's lifestyles and certain societal norms (cf Jdg 16:1-4; 17:6; 21:25).<sup>513</sup>

### 6.2.3 Harlotry and patriarchy

Bird (1989:120-121) perceives that instead of the acceptance of a harlot (as explained above), a prostitute was 'a dishonored member of society'. According to Bird (1989:120-121), the harlot as the social outcast lived on the fringes of city (or village) life, at gateways or city walls (cf Marsman 2003:419, 431, 433). She was isolated from 'normal women' – married women – through 'habitat' and 'distinctive dress' (Gn 38:15; Pr 7:19) and probably hairstyle as well (Bird 1989:120-121). Harlots dressed distinctively, in bright and colourful clothing (Hardaway 2003:139) and wore specific hairstyles to be clearly recognisable (Nelson 1996; cf Camp 2000:41, 44). A harlot might also have worn a veil (Nelson 1996; Frymer-Kensky 1996:404).<sup>514</sup> The harlot was apparently a skilled singer and player of the harp (cf Is 23:16; Hardaway 2003:139). She did her trade at night in the dark when 'honorable women' were safely 'secluded' in their houses (Bird 1989:120-121). Frymer-Kensky (1996:404), however, notes that apart from veiled Tamar who waited at a crossroad and Rahab who seemingly did her trade in her house, little is known 'of how harlots worked'.

And yet a contradiction is encountered when presented with these facts. The harlot was a free citizen who went without the authority of a husband. She therefore might have had legal rights that married women did not have (Bird 1989:120; cf Emmerson 1989:380). The harlot thus had freedoms and rights that were denied to her more conservative and culturally accepted counterpart, and yet she was a defiled person living 'on the outskirts of the city where the refuse is dumped' (Bird 1989:121). It has been suggested, considering Deuteronomy 23:18, that harlots could make vows (Camp 2000:46). In view of the above, the harlot was thus both blessed and cursed, desired and shunned (cf Jdg 11:1; 16:1, 4; Bird 1989:121-122; Marsman 2003:419).

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<sup>513</sup> In my opinion, harlotry was not a symbol of benevolent patriarchy (for the father would protect his family and maintain covenantal principles) but rather a sign of the deteriorating covenantal values in the theocracy.

<sup>514</sup> Frymer-Kensky (1996:404) notes that in Assyria the harlot was forbidden to wear the veil. The veil worn by Tamar was probably to hide her identity.

Harlotry, according to Bird (1989:121), was a sign of urban patriarchy of which the basis was the ‘unequal distribution of status and power between the sexes ... exhibited ... in asymmetry of sexual roles, obligations and expectations’. The ambivalence in the ancient male attitude towards women is revealed through harlotry. In antiquity, men’s need for authority over women demanded their control over the sexuality of their wives (Bird 1989:121). At the same time, they required sexual contact with women other than their wives. The imbalance in status between the genders as well as between women in the patriarchal system is symbolised by the creation of the two types of women in ancient times. The first type obeyed the rules of her community but was powerless. The second type acted contrary to societal norms but had certain rights the obedient woman lacked (Bird 1989:121).<sup>515</sup> I believe that these imbalances were the result of the decaying covenantal principles in theocracy. The equality, value and respect YHWH desired for all the people – men, women, children, the orphan and the widow, for example – were fast eroding because the people were worshipping the foreign gods and adopting the customs of the Canaanite people (cf Jdg 2; 3:1-7; 6:27; 8:33-34; 17:1-6).

The spirit of the times described in the Book of Judges (17:6; 21:25) might offer an explanation as to how women could make their personal lifestyle choices based on their own enjoyment of a profession and not just for economic benefits. Societal upheavals, impoverishment and anarchistic times occurred in the Book of Judges (Jdg 4:3; 6:1-6; 17:6; 20; 21:25). They were the consequences of the violation of the covenant with YHWH (see 4.31).

These factors might explain why certain women risked possible infamy and ostracism from conventional society if the ideas of Bird (1989:120-121) are applicable to the societies in pre-monarchic Israel. On the other hand, apparently, women were as free as men, considering Judges 17:6 and 21:25 when everyone did as they saw fit.

Considering these passages, harlots would have been accepted members of society without risk to their reputation. Nevertheless, one may consider that patriarchy would naturally have allowed for harlots – it was to the advantage of men.

Harlotry in the Book of Judges may be characteristic of the variant patriarchal system described in previous chapters (cf 2.4.1.1). I believe that harlotry might indicate

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<sup>515</sup> These views are not mine but Bird’s.

women's autonomy in a variant patriarchal system (we can consider Delilah's autonomy in Judges 16 in light of this type of patriarchy). Certain equalities in terms of sexual partners and preferences between the genders that even in modern times might be frowned upon were apparently accepted in the Book of Judges.<sup>516</sup> Just as men displayed sexual autonomy, so too did women. However, if harlotry was an indication of the variant patriarchal system in pre-monarchic Israel, I doubt it would have been an acceptable practice within the covenant the people had made with YHWH.

Harlotry might also negate the idea that men controlled and had ownership over women's sexuality in all ways and at all times in their lives. This idea is possible if harlotry was a profession of choice and if it had functioned as a means of expressing women's sexual autonomy. Although referring to the city of Nineveh, Renz (2005:528) puts forth the notion of a sexually independent and self-assured woman that might have existed in the pre-monarchic period, such as the character of Delilah (cf Berlin 2008:63).

#### **6.2.4 Harlotry and female sexuality**

Is it possible that the Book of Judges depicts a period in the history of the Israelites that can be likened to the sexual revolution of the 1960s? In the latter movement, long-held cultural codes of behaviour associated with sexuality and communal interactions were defied (Allyn 2001:3-5). A similar scenario is encountered in some of the narratives in the Book of Judges (Jdg 11:1-2; 16). With the sexual liberation movement of the 1960s came the acceptance of premarital sex (see Escoffier [ed] 2003). In 1960's and the 1970s the sexual revolution was also about the emancipation of Western society from their traditional (Judeo-Christian/Biblical) view of human sexuality (Escoffier [ed] 2003:xii-xiii). Escoffier ([ed] 2003:xiv) comments that the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s 'gained its momentum from the confluence of numerous social currents' through which 'demographic, cultural, technological, social and political factors all came together...'

Analogous to the merging of numerous social elements in the 1960s and 1970s, a convergence of various socio-religious streams occurred in pre-monarchic Israel. It is

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<sup>516</sup> Bird (1989:120-121), for example, derives the ancients' attitude towards prostitution from a modern perspective. Rahab (Jos 1) and Delilah (Jdg 16) apparently offer a different more positive societal attitude towards harlots in the Old Testament.

possible that the influences of Canaanite cults and customs exposed the pre-monarchic Israelites to sexual practices that were not a part of the YHWH religion. Is it possible that like the Western women of the 1960s and 1970s who ‘liberated’ themselves from traditional views of feminine sexuality, some of the proto-Israelite and non-Israelite women (such as the mother of Jephthah [Jdg 11:1-2], the prostitute in Judges 16:1, and Delilah in Judges 16:4-19) experienced their own version of this liberation? Harlotry may have been a manner in which the pre-monarchic women expressed their liberated sexuality in addition to benefitting from it financially. Nemet-Nejat (2014a:86) views harlotry as ‘bartering for sexual favors’ in the pre-coinage societies of the ancient Near East (including ancient Israel). However, I believe that for those women possibly skilled in a craft (cf Jdg 16:13-14) and of a higher social standing, harlotry offered them a role and status that went beyond mere carnality and money-making (see 6.2.1.1; 6.2.1.2; 6.2.2). One can also imagine a woman’s sense of power in the transmission of knowledge and ideas that would lead to the betterment of her male visitors for which she in turn was compensated.<sup>517</sup>

### 6.3 BEYOND ABUSE

#### 6.3.1 Introduction

Previously in this chapter, the idea that women in the Book of Judges were overall regarded with respect and received deferential treatment from members in the community was presented. Achsah (Jdg 1:11, 14-15), Deborah and Jael (Jdg 4-5) as well as the woman of Thebez (Jdg 9:53) are depicted as dynamically forceful in the community (Constable 2012b). But as the story of the pre-monarchic Israelites progresses, the image of the women as esteemed leaders, mothers and wives is transformed into one of victims of violence, cruelty and of death (cf Jdg 19:25; 20:48; 21:10-11, 23; Constable 2012b).

The ill-fated lives of the women, their abuse and death are held as examples of ‘lessons of contempt’ (Stanton 2002:16), evil teachings (Neyman 2002:17) contained within the Biblical narratives ‘from which women still suffer today’ (Stanton 2002:16; cf Stanton 1985). The statements by Stanton (2002:16) and Neyman (2002:17), although

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<sup>517</sup> By contrast, Bird (1989:130) describes the harlot as viewed by ancient society (after Iron Age I and based on Jr 5:4-5) as ‘the lowest of the low ... lacking in wisdom, morals and religious knowledge ... a predator preying on the weakness of men, a mercenary’. Perhaps this view is indicative of the disintegration of female authority and power after Iron Age I (cf Bird 1989:130).

written over 100 years ago, are still commonly held perceptions among feminists about ancient patriarchal structures, and in particularly patriarchal governance in the Bible.

It is specifically the Book of Judges that has provided feminist with abundant confirmation of the innately evil and contemptuous nature of patriarchy towards women, the legacy of which is still perpetuated in the modern abusive patriarchal systems in which ‘men [are] treating women as the men please’ to maintain ‘male dominance’ ([insertion mine], Block 1999a:50, 52).

Considering the above, I will discuss the rape and death of the concubine of the Levite (Jdg 19) in the final part of this chapter. I will start the discussion by contrasting two women, Achsah and the concubine, to emphasise the difference in their lives and social status. I will next point out the violence perpetrated against women in the modern world, with specific reference to South Africa. As mentioned above, Biblical patriarchy is believed to be the causative means behind the crimes committed against women in the modern world. I will, however, detail what I believe to be the true causes of the culture of rape in South Africa. Then, I will end the discussion with the rape and death of the concubine of the Levite in Judges 19 and try to explain in defence of the Bible why there are other factors involved in her death. In the discussion, I emphasise the roles and status of the concubine in the pre-monarchic period.

### **6.3.2 A tale of two women**

#### **a. Achsah**

Klein (1999:18) ‘reads’ the resourceful and proactive Achsah ‘as a role model of propriety for later portrayals of women in the Book of Judges’ (cf Block 1999a:48). She was the ‘ideal of womanhood in Judges’ (Klein 1999:18). Achsah (cf 2.5.1; 5.5.2.1a) was promised in marriage to the man who could capture Debir (Kiriath Sepher). Othniel managed to seize Debir and thus won Achsah as his wife (Jdg 1:11).<sup>518</sup> Land in the Negev without streams or rivers was given to Achsah as a dowry by her father (Lockyer 1967:29; Fretz 1996a:56;

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<sup>518</sup> Othniel is described as the younger brother of Caleb in Judges 1:11. Gunn (2005:23-25), however, notes that Othniel would thus have married his niece, which would have made the marriage improper. It is more likely that Othniel was a kinsman of Caleb (Gunn 2005:25).

Block 1999a:48). Avi-Yonah (2007:356), however, asserts that Achsah was given in marriage to Othniel without a dowry (see Le Roux 2015 on this matter).

The supply of water from the cisterns was evidently not adequate for the agricultural demands of the land and the raising of cattle (Meeker 2013; cf Douglas & Tenney 2011a). Thus, Achsah urged her husband, Othniel, to ask her father for land together with her, but eventually she was the one who requested rights to more permanent water resources (Niditch 2001:178; cf Cundall & Morris 2011:117). Fewell (1998:82) notes that Achsah's speech to her father was 'respectfully confrontational' for, as Gunn (2005:28) states, she was a keen judge of her father's character (who was tender-hearted towards her). She was unafraid, esteemed and loved by her husband who wanted her and not her property (cf Jdg 1:14). She had a vision which was reflective of her knowledge of a prosperous future in which land and water featured prominently (Fewell 1998:82).

Achsah thus requested a specific piece of land, the Upper and Lower Springs, and Caleb granted it to her (Avi-Yonah 2007:356). In granting Achsah a blessing (special favour) (Jdg 1:15), Caleb displayed the benevolent character of the patriarchal father that respectfully grants a daughter her rights and privileges (Block 1999a:48; Wong 2012; cf Lockyer 1967:27). The husband Othniel and the wife Achsah 'mutually advise' and 'jointly agree about that which is for the common good of their family' (Gunn 2005:27). Mutual authority and consent is also found in the relationship between Samson's mother and father (Jdg 14:2-5) as well as between Barak and Deborah in Judges 4-5.

#### b. The concubine: marriage and status

It is said that the narrative of the concubine in Judges 19 portrays the disintegration of Israelite morality, the indescribable gravity of dissolution (Lockyer 1967:188). Day (2001:576) notes that the Israelites are described as corrupt as in the days of Gibeah in Hosea 9:9, which is a reference to the atrocity in Judges 19-20 when a Levite's concubine was raped and murdered in Gibeah (cf Miller 2003: 99-115).

The divergent life and treatment of Achsah and that of the concubine reveal the gradual decline of communal life in the era of the Judges (Constable 2012b). The marriages of Achsah and the concubine are representations of the variances in the social and religious spheres in Achsah and the concubine's times. Achsah and Othniel's marriage is



characterised by harmony and equal status and rights existing within the milieu of the benevolent father (under YHWH's rule) (Gunn 2005:27).

In contrast to the marriage of Achsah and Othniel (see above), the concubine and the Levite's marriage is one of inequality in legal and social status (Trible 1984:74). The Levite is assumed to have been a revered man of the community (Trible 1984:74), the concubine without a great deal of authority in the household. The concubine might have been a slave. However, Millgram (2010:270) notes that a concubine was often a woman who hailed from a lower socio-economic status and background. 'Sometimes her status was lower because her father was not a landowner' (Carvalho 2006:37-38). Women who were sexually assaulted, who were orphans or divorced would also be defined as lower in status (Carvalho 2006:37-38). Gorospe and Ringma (2016:244) comment that the concubine might have been 'a former slave because of family debt'. As the sexual partner of the Levite, her status had been elevated to that of concubine (Gorospe & Ringma 2016:244).

They might have been legally married, but the concubine occupied an inferior role and status to a possible first wife of the Levite (Douglas & Tenney 2011d). Metzger and Coogan [eds] (1993:691) observe that concubines might not have had equal rights to a first wife, but they were accepted by law (in other words, the husband was legally entitled to have sexual relations with a concubine; see Youngblood [ed] 2014:264) and in the community. Under the code of Hammurabi, which apparently was a precedent followed by the Israelites, the rights of the concubine were safeguarded (even if she did not have the same rights as a [first] wife) (Douglas & Tenney 2011e). According to the code of Hammurabi, a barren wife could give a slave to her husband as a concubine (De Vaux 1997:24). A husband, however, could 'himself take a concubine even if his wife has borne him children, but the concubine never has the same rights as the wife' (De Vaux 1997:24; see Cook 2010:111-112). Furthermore, the husband was unable to take another concubine if the first was barren<sup>519</sup> (De Vaux 1997:24).

I believe that if the concubine had borne the Levite children (the narrative in Judges

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<sup>519</sup> In the pre-monarchic period, however, where social and religious boundaries were constantly broken, 'there was no limit to the number of wives and concubines a man might have' (cf Jdg 8:30-31; De Vaux 1997:24)

does not indicate that she did), she would have enjoyed the role and status of a mother and its associated authority, albeit still taking second place to the first wife. Her role as mother and the associated status would have been firmly entrenched in the household since the children of the concubine were heirs to all the property (see Ramsey 1999:30). However, 'if the wife herself bears children after the concubine has borne children, all the inherited property goes to the biological children of the wife' (Ramsey 1999:30). According to Genesis 29:30, the children of the concubine were 'reckoned among the heirs' (Ramsey 1999:30). Zvi (2006:191), nevertheless, remarks that the children of the concubine were not allowed full heritage rights. Johns (1911) and Millgram (2010:270) state that the concubine's children were legitimate and had full rights of inheritance.

A concubine could not be sold if the husband lost interest in her (Ex 21:8; Youngblood [ed] 2014:264). The rights of concubines were also protected by the law of Moses which 'guarded them from inhumane and callous treatment' (Youngblood [ed] 2016:264) which I believe was in keeping with the covenantal laws between YHWH and the people. Thus, the concubine had a legal right to the kindness and benevolence of the head of the household. Consequently, even if the concubine of the Levite had the status of a servant or a slave, she had the right to be treated humanely in a system of male rule that was expected to protect her (see Zvi 2006:191). Hiers (2012:36) remarks that concubines could have been treated as property and could be subject to abuse by their husbands or other members of the household. However, such abusive treatment went against covenantal principles and was censured in Judges 19-21 (see Hiers 2012:36).

According to Exodus 21:10 if the husband of the concubine were to take another wife, the concubine retained her marital rights or she was to go free. If the relationship between the concubine and the Levite ended, then it ended in freedom for the concubine (cf Jdg 19:2; Wolff 1974:120). According to Gorospe and Ringma (2016:244), the woman in Judges 19 retained the status of a concubine and did not acquire the legal status of a primary (or first) wife which came with 'a greater role and privileges [which] may indicate his [the Levite's] low regard for her' (insertion mine). It is possible that the concubine was unable to bear the Levite children, in which case she would remain in the household only for sexual purposes (Gorospe & Ringma 2016:244).

The concubine in Judges was probably a free woman from Bethlehem (Jdg 19:1-2; see Millgram 2010:270; Marsman 2003:140) who might have brought a dowry into the marriage (cf Kimuhu 2008:128). However, Carvalho (2006:37-38) comments that the concubine (in early Israel) had no dowry. The Levite was not obligated to pay a bride price for her as a concubine (see Carvalho 2006:38). As a free woman, the concubine was higher up the social strata than a slave concubine (Marsman 2003:140). According to custom, the Levite possibly married her for 'procreation concerns' (Marsman 2003:140-141; cf Wright 1992:761-769). Consequently, the primary role of the concubine, irrespective of her status as either a slave or a free woman, would have been to bear children for the Levite. As mentioned above, motherhood would have uplifted the social status of the concubine (see Hastings [ed] 2004:466). However, she still would have been considered inferior to the first wife (Douglas & Tenney 2011d; Metzger & Coogan [eds] (1993:691).

In contrast to Achsah who was the perfect model of womankind (Klein 1999:18) and lived the life of a wife with full legal rights, the life of the concubine might have been one with insecure legal rights and one that culminated in a horrific end. The concubine's marriage to the Levite apparently was an unhappy one. If she had married the Levite for purely economic reasons (Marsman 2003:14-141), these were not enough for her to stay. She left him and returned to her father's house (Jdg 9:2). Unlike Achsah who remained with her husband Othniel, the concubine departed from her husband and left behind the safe boundaries of her marriage (Leeb 2000:140). She stayed at her father's house for four months before the Levite came to woo her back.

The marriage of the Levite and the concubine appears to have been one of discord and dissatisfaction. Judges does not indicate her having borne children. If she was barren, her status would have been even lower (see Gorospe & Ringma 2016:244). In keeping with the autonomous behaviour of most of the women in Judges, even the ill-fated concubine displayed a certain independence by separating from her husband (see Klein 29:1993) for four months and going back to him of her own accord. In parting from her husband, it seems his authority over her was limited (cf Jdg 19:2).

c. Was patriarchy responsible for the death of the concubine?

As mentioned above (see 6.1), according to the covenantal rules and principles, all people were equally valued. YHWH did not discriminate between men and women or believe one person to be of higher worth in receiving His blessings. I have therefore selected the title ‘beyond abuse’ for this segment on the concubine to indicate that the life of the concubine should not only be viewed in terms of her abuse and death, but also in light of the covenantal principles that valued her equally alongside other people (see 6.1). In Chapter One (see 1.1.1; 1.1.1.1-1.1.1.3 a, b, c, d; see also 2.3.3.1) I discussed feminist perspectives of patriarchy. According to these viewpoints, patriarchy in the Bible and in the modern age is always seen as abusive and oppressive of women. However, my counterargument is that a variant patriarchal system existed in the pre-monarchic period in which women could occupy roles with concomitant status as well as authority (see 2.4.1.1 a, b, c; see also 2.2.2.1; 2.3.3.1).

Consequently, as I discuss the reasons for the abuse and death of the concubine, it will be from the viewpoint that mostly a benevolent patriarchy was operative in the pre-monarchic period and that it was the violation of the covenantal principles and subsequent corruption of the people in the theocracy that was the result of the horrible incident in Judges 19. According to Hiers (2012:36), the narrative in Judges 19 and the subsequent expressions of depravity described in Judges 21 were said to illustrate ‘... those days [when] there was no king in Israel; [and] every man did what was right in his own eyes’ (Jdg 19:1; cf also 17:6).

The rape and death of the concubine must be two of the most horrific crimes committed against a woman or any person in the Bible. The concubine left her husband (Jdg 19:2), the Levite went after her and convinced her to return to him (Jdg 19:3). His heartfelt promises probably swayed the woman and they, after a stay of five days at her father’s house, made the journey back to Ephraim. On their way back to the hill country, they stopped over in Gibeah, a Benjamite city. It was here where the woman was raped and abused to death.

The concubine and her husband were invited to stay at the house of an old man. Sometime during the evening meal some wicked men surrounded the house and demanded to have sexual intercourse with the Levite (Jdg 19:22). Attempting to negotiate with the Benjamites, the host offered to send out his daughter and the concubine (Jdg 19:24). Much

has been written about the subordinate position women occupied in the Israelite community and the absolute authority of men over women (Ebeling 2010:83). According to Marsman (2002:145), a wife was under the control of her husband as it is revealed in the words for ‘wife’ and ‘husband’ used in the Bible. A wife is referred to as ‘woman’ or ‘wife’, while a husband is called ‘man’, ‘husband’, ‘lord’ or ‘owner’ (Marsman 2003:145-146). Marsman (2003:146), however, comments that nowhere does the Biblical narratives indicate a husband’s absolute control over his wife (cf Ebeling 2010:83; Hiers 2012:36). In my opinion, the terminology is a reflection not of ownership and control over the wife but of the husband’s ownership of the benevolence in his household and which is not illustrated in Judges 19 by the Levite and their host.

This type of lordship (of the benevolent *paterfamilias* – see 2.4.1.2-2.4.1.3) allows the support and mutual counsel and agreement between the man and wife (Gunn 2005:27). It is the same type of lordship or ownership that YHWH had over the Israelites as their Father and God under His leadership. It was not one that denied the Israelites independent behaviour or thought, or deprived them of respect and dignity. This also applied to a husband’s treatment of his wife. Like YHWH, the husband’s lordship should be one of love, compassion, respect, self-sacrifice, protection and guardianship. Benevolent patriarchy is exercised ‘not from a position of power but out of compassion and a sense of responsibility’ (Block 1999a:54). The Levite showed none of the benevolent leadership of the *paterfamilias*. When he handed over the concubine to her assailants, he was acting outside of YHWH’s covenant.

Consequently, the abuse and death of women (and other innocent people) is a sign of the moral bankruptcy, militancy, interruptions and fragmentation of benevolent patrimonial authority in which people were devalued and stripped of their humanity, contrary to the covenantal principles YHWH had established between Him and the people.

#### d. Consequences of the rape and death of the concubine

Judges 20:1-46 narrates the story of the Israelite conflict with the Benjamites in the aftermath of the rape and death of the concubine of the Levite by some of the Benjamite men in Gibeah. The civil war waged against the Benjamites by the other 11 tribes resulted in the near annihilation of the Benjamites. Only about 600 men survived the full-blown

attack (Jdg 20:20, 21; 21:10; Easton 1997a). The catastrophic course of events that followed the death of the concubine could have been avoided. The Israelites' demanded the Benjamites to relinquish the guilty men (Brensinger 1999:205). The refusal of the Benjamites produced a breach of the covenant (Coffman 1999e).<sup>520</sup> This was an event that was primarily a betrayal of God since the covenant was sacred (Pett 2013d). The Benjamites prepared for war, probably emboldened by their great battle skills as well as knowledge of the territory (Torrey 2016; Coffman 1999e; Brensinger 1999:205). The tribal war that ensued resulted in two setbacks for the Israelites and the eventual defeat of the Benjamites (Brensinger 1999:205; Pett 2013d). As mentioned previously about 600 Benjamite men survived and fled into the desert (Jdg 20:47; Torrey 2016). According to Pett (2013d), it took about four months for the Israelites to destroy the Benjamite cities with all the inhabitants, animals and possessions (cf Jdg 20:47). Consequently, a shortage of wives for the Benjamites occurred (Jdg 21).

In light of the above, it is clear that the rape and death of the concubine had widespread consequences. However, it was the women that suffered the most. For example, the women of the Benjamites were slain (Jdg 20:47), the women of Jabesh Gilead were murdered, a few hundred captured, and the girls of Shiloh were abducted. All in all, women had lost daughters, sons, husbands and other family members (cf Jdg 20:24, 31). But above all, many women lost their lives.

Probably because they cannot be fully comprehended in modern times, a mysteriousness surrounds the terrible events described in Judges 19-21. I believe that these dreadful occurrences were ultimately also attacks on women as well as the value of their roles and status in the Israelite community that could not be accepted in the eras beyond the pre-monarchic period when men became kings and theocracy became redundant. YHWH's covenantal rules and principles which prized mutual equality and respect between men and women were done away with. The monarchic period united the tribes but brought about a change in social, political and economic lifestyles from which women were

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<sup>520</sup> The Benjamites broke the covenant (the people had made with YHWH in Joshua 24:25-26) to worship YHWH alone and follow Him and His laws. Instead of siding with justice, the Benjamites refused to uphold the covenant (Deffinbaugh 2012).

more and more excluded (see Frymer-Kensky 2002:xviii and Steinberg 2010:188; Kelle 2016:190).

e. Possible causes for the abuse of women in the Book of Judges

In modern society, crimes committed against women are correlated (by feminists, for example – see 1.1.1; 1.1.1.1-1.1.1.3 a, b, c, d; 2.3.3.1) with the abuse and exploitation of women in the Old Testament, of which distressing examples are found in the Book of Judges. Block (1999a:52) comments that the cause of the abuse of women in the Book of Judges since it happened in ‘one direction that is males abusing females’ is related to oppressive male patriarchy structures (by certain[feminist] scholars).<sup>521</sup> These negative patriarchal systems are also said to be the cause of crimes against women in modern times. I have argued in 5.7.2 c that it was rather interruptions and the disintegration of benevolent patrimonial control that caused the dire incidents. In other words, it was the disintegration of the covenantal principles and the lack of regard for YHWH’s leadership by the people that transformed benevolent male rule into the atrocities in Judges 19-21. In the Book of Judges, violence was also perpetrated by women against men, aggressively, directly (Jdg 4-5; 9:53) and indirectly (cf Jdg 14:15-17; 16; 17:2). Hackett (2004:356-364) describes the Book of Judges as a ‘violent book’ in which the relationship between violence and women’s lives is a surprisingly intimate one. The frequent struggles between the Israelites and their neighbours as well as intertribal war generated an ongoing culture of war and violence. It is within this setting that the deterioration of benevolent patriarchy eventually occurred. Moreover, it was the violation of the covenant with YHWH that almost destroyed the tribal community. According to Block (1999a:54), the abuse of the women was not ‘normal or normative’ and neither was it the result of economic or structural problems. ‘Israel’s problem is spiritual’ (Block 1999a:54). This is what the narratives in Judges 11:34-35, 39 and 19-21 reflect (Block 1999a:54).

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<sup>521</sup> Block, however, holds the view that the abuse of women in the Bible and modern times is caused by the moral corruption of people within a particular societal organisation in Western societies and not the Bible as this would be antithetical to Biblical principles and values (see Block 1999a:45-54).

Below are a few points on the crimes and violence against women in the Western society, with South Africa as a specific focus.<sup>522</sup>

### **6.3.3 Patriarchy and violence against women today**

#### *6.3.3.1 Violence against women in the Western World*

On average, 500 000 cases of rape occur annually in South Africa (One in four men rape 2016. Integrated Regional Information Networks [IRIN] Africa). South Africa records one of the highest numbers of domestic violence against women (Domestic Violence and Abuse 2016. Divorcelaws.co.za. <http://www.divorcelaws.co.za/domestic-violence>). Rape-survivor Charlene Smith (2000) asserts that the ‘role of tradition and religion’ should be looked at to bring an end to the culture of rape endemic to South Africa. Parallel to this, Block (1999a:46) states ‘the abuse of women has reached epidemic proportions in American society...’<sup>523</sup> Block (1999a:46) comments that sociologists find reasons for the violence perpetrated against women in the oppressive patriarchal systems of (Western) societies.

Block (1999a:46) also observes that these sociologists are convinced that the eradication of androcentric hierarchical patterns and the establishment of ‘truly egalitarian forms’ will resolve the crimes committed against women. The reader of the Old Testament need only to look at the Book of Judges, and in particular the rape, abuse and death of the Levite’s concubine (Jdg 19) for evidence to support feminists’ claim that the Bible or Biblical patriarchy is to blame for the oppression and crimes committed against women in the modern Western cultures (Block 1999a:46). The validity of this reasoning, however, will be analysed below. Is Biblical patriarchy truly to blame for the high statistics of rape and domestic abuse of women in South Africa?

#### **a. Biblical patriarchy as the cause of violence against women?**

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<sup>522</sup> I have elected to discuss the violence against women in modern times with specific reference to South Africa because it is my beloved home country where currently women are vulnerable to the most horrific abuses often by their own (male) family members. I wish to highlight this.

<sup>523</sup> In a 2009 study conducted by the World Health Organization (WHO) that was based on domestic violence against women in 10 different countries, the WHO reported that 15-17% of women revealed their sexual or physical abuse at the hands of a partner or husband (Malina 2010). Dayimani (2014) reports that in South Africa, a woman is killed about every 8 hours by her intimate partner.



Feminist theologian Ruth Ruether comments that ‘patriarchal [religion] provides a legitimate platform for the controlling authority of the male hegemonic class’ ([my insertion], cf 1.1.1; 1.1.1.1-1.1.1.3 a, b, c, d). Consequently, the prevailing male social structure (as a vestige from Biblical times) reduces women to subjugation. Male hegemony both creates and validates aggressive power over women and other oppressed people whilst denying these subjugated groups an authentic equal distribution of power in their society (Ruether 2000; 2012:22-33). I believe Ruether’s arguments to be a matter of perspective that is in keeping with the feminist paradigm of Biblical patriarchy. Accordingly, feminists always perceive men to be in control of and over women in the Bible. As I have argued (see 2.2.2; 2.2.2.1; 2.4.1.1 a, b, c), in the pre-monarchic era, benevolent patrimonial rule under YHWH’s Kingship was supposed to be the organisational system that characterised the tribal community. Within this system, women were allowed autonomy and authority that could paralleled that of men (see 2.2.2; 2.2.2.1; 2.4.1.1 a, b, c; 2.4.1.2; 2.4.1.3; 2.5.2; 2.6.2; 2.6.3; 3.2.1.4; 4.3.1; 5.1.1; 5.3.1.3; 5.5.2.1 a, b; 5.7.1; 5.8.3). It was women’s authority in the domestic sphere that allowed the continuation of the Israelite community given the frequency of warfare and tribal conflicts. It was only after this period that the status of women steadily fell. Under YHWH’s theocratic rule, the position of women was intended to be different than what the situation allowed later. I must admit that in reality, however, this was not always the case (cf Jdg 19-21).

In the modern age, some fundamentalist churches do preach that women should be submissive to male rule in their households to the point where women are denied basic human rights, their autonomy and authority, and are abused. However, I argue that this is mainly because of a misunderstanding or misinterpretation of what YHWH intended for His people and what patriarchy was supposed to be: benevolent to the wife and family. As can be seen in some of the narratives in the Book of Judges, YHWH did not support the dominant cultural ideology (if it was abusive and malevolent) (cf Jdg 19). For example, in Judges 1:4 and 5:13 one gets the impression that the author/editor is trying to convey the idea of a different ‘culture’– a culture of mutual respect, equality and love to all people (including women, the handicapped and heathen) in the pre-monarchic community under the covenantal rule and principles of YHWH (see 2.3.3; 2.3.3.1; 4.3.1).

Within the Christian household, the husband is commanded to love his wife in the

same manner that Christ loves His church (Eph 5:25). The husband is to love his wife in the same way he loves his own body. These teachings therefore absolutely uphold an equal relationship between husband and wife. In the same manner, YHWH's ideal was for equality between the men and the women under His rule (cf Gn 2:18). However, this is often ignored and instead a misinterpretation of the Biblical narratives that deal with the role of the husband is chosen. In the same manner that the people of YHWH chose to let go of His Kingship and covenantal principles, men in modern times choose to let go of God's rules and love in order to abuse their authority over women.

#### b. Reasons for violence against women in South Africa

According to modern researchers, (South African) women remain in a sadistic partnership with men because they are taught to be submissive (by their traditions and culture, as well as a misinterpretation of the scriptures by the Christian church (see above 6.3.3.1 a) as children. Men are the perpetrators of violence against their wives (cf Wood et al 1998:233-242) because they are taught (by their parents, for example) as boys to be dominant (Dayimani 2014). Women also experience violence and crimes against their bodies such as rape, sexual harassment, physical assault and death by men who are not related to them (see Wilkinson 2016). As we all know, boys and girls learn gender-specific roles from an early age (see Hanish 2014:1-4). Learned behaviours play a significant part in the lives of boys and girls as they grow up. They learn to model themselves on the behaviour of inter alia their mothers and fathers in their families (Witt 1997). They are taught at home, at church, at school and in their society in general to adopt the same behaviour and roles (see Crespi 2003:1-36; Marks, Bun & McHale 2009; Csinos 2010:23-28). In 6.3.3.1a, I have argued that it is the misinterpretation of the father's (and the mother's) role that can cause the subjugation of women (in Christian families). The rape, abuse and death of the concubine (Jdg 19) were more consequences of the violence and disobedience to covenantal principles of YHWH (that expressed YHWH's love and kindness to all His people) than it was the result of Biblical patriarchy which I have argued (see 2.2.2; 2.2.2.1; 2.4.1.1 a, b, c) was benevolent in the pre-monarchic period when the people followed YHWH and His rule.

Further correlation between the patriarchal structure of the Old Testament as the

creator and promoter of crimes committed against women (within an intimate partnership and outside one) in the modern South African environment seems to dim when other factors are taken into consideration.

Day [sa] reports Palesa Makheta, the spokesperson for People Opposing Women's Abuse, as saying that black South African women remain in abusive intimate partnerships because of (1) a poor family background, (2) lack of education, (3) the traditional *lobola* system in which women have no rights, and (4) a closed society that prevents women from expressing instances of domestic violence (Jewkes et al 2002:1603-1607). In the same manner, women suffer violence and abuse outside of a partnership for reasons 1 and 2 and in many instances women do not report their attackers because they feel powerless and afraid in a closed society that makes them feel ashamed and guilty for their abuse and rape.

The Bible, as indicated above, is also said to perpetuate the abuse of women in modern times. However, for South African women of all ethnicities, threats of harm being done to themselves and their children, fear of losing their children, isolation from friends and family, the lack of a support system, financial dependence and being unaware of their rights lead many women to stay with and accept the violence and abuse perpetrated by their husbands or life partners (Erasmus 2013; cf Vogelmann & Eagle 1991:209-229).<sup>524</sup> Rapists will continue to rape until they are caught.

To say that violence against (South African) women is a consequence of the disparity in power structures inherent in patriarchal systems (Wood et al 1998:233-242; cf Dayimani 2014) could be misleading (see 6.3.3.1 a and above). Certain relationships in the Bible may also be viewed as examples of such a gender disparity (cf Jdg 1:11-15; 11:34-40; 19). However, the form of (benevolent) patriarchy of the pre-monarchic period that is described by Meyers (2006:245-251; 2014:827) and others as also being a heterarchy (2.2.2.1; 5.1.1; 5.3.2), which ideally allowed the genders an equal powerbase (though in reality it was not always the case), could not have resulted in the atrocities committed against the unnamed Levite's concubine or the abduction and rape of the women in Judges

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<sup>524</sup> Pornography, graphic novels and the social media also seem to play a role in male aggression towards women (Graham 2003:435-437, 440-443), which is true of all societies.

21. Male abuse of power over women is the consequence of the moral collapse of the people in the pre-monarchic theocracy.<sup>525</sup>

#### 6.3.4 The concubine

##### 6.3.4.1 *Assertive, audacious and autonomous*

The exact relationship between the Levite and his concubine (see 6.3.2 b, c) in Judges 19 is difficult to define. In Judges 19:1 we are informed that Israel had no king. Similarly, Judges 17:6 and 21:25 declare Israel to be without a king and added to this both passages declare that everyone did as they pleased. Judges 19:1 sets the backdrop to the ensuing events. In my opinion, it presents a reason for the events unfolding in the chapter that include lawlessness, immorality, and disregard for the social and religious authority.<sup>526</sup>

As already mentioned, the rest of the passage in Judges 19:1 tells us that the Levite married a woman from Bethlehem. As a member of the priestly lineage, his life had to be irreproachable (Szpek 2007). Exum (1993:177) mentions the peculiar absence of a first wife in the narrative. Perhaps the Levite married the concubine for reasons other than procreation (Klein 1989:163).<sup>527</sup> This (a primary wife's infertility) would have been according to custom lawful [and probably the only legal motive] ([my insertions], Marsman 2003:140-141; cf Wright 1992:761-769).

Neither the Levite nor the concubine are named. Unlike the Levite who was an honoured member of society, the concubine's social status is ambiguous (Szpek 2007; Tribble 1984:74). Tribble (1984:74) finds her to be an inferior and unequal individual, 'virtually a slave'. It is probable, however, she was a secondary wife with certain rights (Stone 2009a; cf Cundall & Morris 2011:1428-1429). Szpek (2007) concurs and points to

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<sup>525</sup> Feminist scholars often accuse the Bible of being historically incorrect. Therefore, the crimes against the women in the Book of Judges, for example, could also not have taken place (Bloch-Smith & Nakhai 1999:62-92, 101-127). In my opinion, either all the narratives in the Bible are myth or all are actual events that happened. If the Bible is historically invalid, then the idea of it promoting male aggression and dominance is based on myth and not history. The theology, however, often points to Genesis 1 as the reason for all moral and behavioural corruption. For example, the sinful nature of man goes back to the original sin committed by the man and the woman in the garden of Eden. Their rebellion against God caused the fall of all mankind.

<sup>526</sup> Bellis (1994:312-315) comments on the interpretation by inter alia Tribble (1984:64-91) that the Book of Judges is propaganda for monarchy. Brettler (2002:91) thinks that the dismemberment of the concubine is used in the text to 'express the collapse of pre-monarchical society'.

<sup>527</sup> According to Klein (1989:162-163), the Levite probably could not afford the dowry for a wife. 'He pretends to be more affluent than he is'. He married the concubine for 'sexual gratification or housekeeping (or both)' (Klein 1989:162-163).

Judges 19:4, 7, 9 as evidence that the concubine was a second wife (cf Fewell 1992:81). The concubine was presumably a free and autonomous woman asserting her right to walk out on her husband and audacious enough to venture back to her father's house.

Judges 19:2 tells us that she left her husband for an unspecified reason (Stone 2009b). According to Leeb (2000:140), she entered a state of sexual ambiguity when she left her husband. She was not the 'virgin daughter of her father' but was temporarily estranged from her husband. (Leeb 2000:140-141). Exum (1993:179) remarks that she was a sexually autonomous woman who 'puts herself beyond male protection' for which she had to be punished (according to the dominant culture ideology). The Hebrew texts (and the New International Version) indicate that the Levite's wife played the harlot (*zonah*) against him (Exum 1993:177), while Greek texts imply that she was angry with him (Stone 2009b; cf Tribble 1984:74). Judges 19:2 (New International Version) states that she was unfaithful to him and left him to return to her father's house.<sup>528</sup> Exum (1993:177-178) believes that she could not have been promiscuous for her husband would not have gone to woo her back and she would have been stoned. Stone (2009b) puts forth the possibility that since men usually initiated divorce, she, because she left her husband, is perceived to have been a prostitute. For this reason, Webb (1225-1226) feels the use of *zonah* is metaphorical rather than literal. Fewell (1998:81; cf Lockyer 1967:188)<sup>529</sup> cites the reason of her departure as possible abuse already existing in the relationship prior to Judges 19:25-29 (cf Frolov 2013:325). By all appearances, the husband might simply have been uncaring for letting the concubine leave him.<sup>530</sup> He let her go without holding her back – maybe because he was in the wrong. If she had left him in anger, as some believe and as indicated in the Greek texts (Tribble 1984; cf Burney 1920:459; Boling 1992b:1107-1117), he did not retaliate in kind. And after four months he set out to reconcile with his wife and bring her

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<sup>528</sup> According to Deuteronomy 22:21, the penalty for adultery is stoning to death. However, the Levite did not punish his wife as was his right by law. This means that she was not guilty. Klein (1989:163) suggests that the reason might be that he would have been left without a wife 'for whatever reason'. His needs were more important than YHWH's laws (Klein 1989:163).

<sup>529</sup> Boling (1975:273-274) also proposes that the concubine was declared unfaithful only because she left her husband. If she was a prostitute, she would not have been pursued by her husband (cf Exum 1993:178) and she would have been stoned to death.

<sup>530</sup> O'Connell (1996:261) does not believe that the Levite necessarily had the welfare of his wife on his mind when he went to retrieve her for he did not 'explicitly address her until she is violated...' The man seemed to be more concerned about his own suffering when he spoke to the tribes (Jdg 20:4-7; cf Klein 1989:163; cf Exum 1993:183).

back (Jdg 19:3). O'Connell (1996:261) observes that the Levite might not have known where she had gone and only found out later from her father, which accounts for the four months of separation. Webb (2012:1226) describes his 'intentions' for retrieving his wife as 'honorable' and 'serious'. He brought with him two donkeys and a servant on a mission that was carefully planned and undertaken (Jdg 19:3; Webb 2012:1226). At her father's house, he intended to speak kindly to her (literally to her heart) – an indication that he might have provoked her into leaving him (Webb 2012:1226; cf Burney 1920:461).

The wife was evidently also keen on reconciliation and she let the Levite into the house (Jdg 19:3).<sup>531</sup> Inside the house he was joyfully received by the father-in-law (Jdg 19:3-4). He extended the customary hospitality to his guest who ended up staying for five days feasting and drinking (Bellis 1994:309). At the end of five days, the Levite and his wife finally departed (Jdg 19:8-10).

As mentioned before, on their way home, the couple stopped over in Gibeah, a Benjamite town where they would spend the night (Jdg 19:13-15). In the city square they sat and waited for someone to take them in. An old man finally took them in after some difficulty in finding shelter for the night (Jdg 19:16-20). Sometime during the evening meal, the house was surrounded by some wicked Benjamites who demanded to have sexual intercourse with the Levite (Jdg 19:22). The house owner, however, offered his daughter and the Levite's concubine instead. There was no objection on the part of the Levite at this horrendous proposal (Jdg 19:23-14).

Stone (2009) notes that for these men (the owner of the house and the Levite), the sexual violation of a man was more dishonourable than that of a woman (cf McCarty 2015:145-147; cf Exum 1993:182; cf Brettler 2002:83).<sup>532</sup> The wife was silent and so was the daughter of the host. Their experience of the impending violation on their bodies is concealed from the reader of the narrative. Perhaps they were silent not wanting to draw unnecessary attention to themselves (Exum 1993:184). Perhaps the concubine was silently

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<sup>531</sup> Szpek (2007) remarks that it was the father-in-law who came out with a warm welcome to greet the Levite and not the concubine. She does not absolve the father from guilt of the daughter's death for if he did not overextend his hospitality, causing a delay in their return, the concubine might have been spared her ordeal.

<sup>532</sup> A similar scenario takes place in Genesis 19:1-11 when the men of Sodom demanded to have sex with the two angels who visited Lot. Hackett (2004:360-362) finds the motivations of the Gibeah townsmen enigmatic and relates them to a probable unknown threat the Levite posed to these men. I believe that the Levite and his host were men motivated by fear since homosexual rape would 'humiliate' the Levite 'in the most degrading way' and by extension the old man under whose protection the Levite resided.

hopeful that when the men of Gibeah refused the old man's proposal (Jdg 19:25), her husband would have the courage to go outside and save her.

#### *6.3.4.2 Abandoned, abused and dead*

Apparently, the Levite's concubine still had an opportunity to be spared but her husband, probably blinded by panic and his own self-preservation, seized her and forced her out of the house (Jdg 19:25).<sup>533</sup> She was 'expendable to the demands of wicked men' who were given 'a license to rape' her (Trible 1984:74).

McCarty (2015:145-147) comments that if these were homosexual men, the 'unspeakable tragedy' of her repeated rape during the night until the break of morning would not have occurred (cf Exum 1993:182). She died of her injuries sustained at the hands of a lustful gang of evil men. There is no mitigation for their evil because it cannot be placed within a historical framework of reference (McCarty 2015:145-147). Her husband cut up her body into 12 pieces and sent them throughout the land, probably to the 12 tribes including the Benjamites. This resulted in a war in which all the Benjamite women and most of the men were killed (Jdg 20:47-48).

#### *6.3.4.3 An alternative view of the abuse of the concubine*

Was the woman's rape and death the result of an oppressive and abusive patriarchal system operative in the Book of Judges that viewed women as subhuman as some claim (Block 1999a:46-55)? Block offers two possible reasons why this is not the case. Firstly, he states that 'the potential for abuse is not a function of gender'. The potential for patriarchy to dissolve into a system where the abuse of power and socio-economic mistreatment of the 'inferiors' serve the interests of the 'superiors' is true for matriarchy as well (cf Gn 16:6; 2 Ki 11:1).<sup>534</sup> Secondly, the Book of Judges cannot be a 'normative of portrayal of Israelite society in general' in terms of the abuse and violence perpetrated against some women (cf Jdg 19-21; Block 1999a:54). The reader is confronted with 'a nation in a state of serious

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<sup>533</sup> Exum (1993:183) observes that it is puzzling that although both women were offered, it was only the wife that was thrown out.

<sup>534</sup> Block (1999a:53) asserts that the society in the Book of Judges was not a 'totally egalitarian' community; instead, some members must have been 'elevated to positions of authority' which opens the door to the abuse of power.

and progressive recidivism' (Block 1999a:54). The depiction of male violence against women during the pre-monarchic period was therefore a distressing symbol of Israel's spiritual degeneration and the 'Canaanization of her society' (Block 1999a:54). In other words, male violence was the result of the pre-monarchic tribal community's refusal to accept YHWH's theocratic rule and laws.

The problem of male abuse of women in the Bible, therefore, is not political or patriarchy but spiritual. Men and women had turned away from God and His precepts. Women too were guilty because they alongside their husbands venerated the Canaanite idols and broke the covenant the people had made with YHWH. This is reflected in the story of the Levite and his wife (Jdg 19). Klein (1989:163) comments that the concubine, for leaving her husband, the Levite (for causing her death) as well as the father-in-law (for not taking responsibility for his daughter's behaviour) were living outside of YHWH's covenant. Feminists' proposals of solving modern crimes against women by changing all ranked structures of power to egalitarian social, political and economic establishments are apparently hopeless. The solution is to turn to God for forgiveness of sin, healing and transformation (cf Jdg 2:16, 18; 3:9; 10:32-35). 'Then' avers Block (1999a:54) 'men will treat women with the respect and dignity they deserve as co-images of God himself' (Gn 1:26; cf 1:28; 2:18).

#### 6.4 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have discussed the roles and status of the harlot, with emphasis on Delilah. Accordingly, harlots could be women who came from diverse social economic backgrounds. For example, they could be orphans, widows, aliens or even from a higher social rank, such as I presume Delilah to have been. On the whole, harlots lived outside the authoritative sphere of the household. Consequently, they had a greater degree of independence and authority than most other women. One of the roles of the socially higher-born harlots could have been to provide their male guests with social upliftment by sharing certain knowledge with them. I believe that even being socially associated with this type of women might have granted men more status in their community. By investigating this possible role of the harlot in pre-monarchic Israel, I had hoped to remove them from the dishonour usually associated with the women, and hence the title 'beyond shame' for this



segment. Economic needs might also have driven women into harlotry. Therefore, by accepting a harlot's role in life, women could support their impoverished families. Harlots could also have represented women's autonomy over their own sexuality and the expression of it by means of this career choice. In their roles as companions who socially uplifted men, as the givers of knowledge, as financial supporters of their family, and as the expression of women's ownership over their own sexuality, a certain status would have been attached to these positions. Far from being just the outcast, the 'bad' women in society, the harlot could have had the status and authority that came with the roles described above.

In the last segment, I have discussed the role and status of the concubine of the Levite. I chose the title 'beyond abuse' for this part about the concubine because I believe her to have been an audacious and autonomous woman despite her abuse and death. I also looked at the abuse of the concubine and the abuse of women in modern times. Similar to the harlot, concubines came from various socio-economic backgrounds. Concubines were usually slaves, servants, divorced women, orphans or free women born in families that did not own land. Concubines, however, were not harlots. Their status was that of a 'second' wife and their primary role was for sexual procreation purposes in the household of the husband. Motherhood could elevate the status of a concubine. The status of the concubine, though legally recognised and protected by, for example, the law of Moses, was lower than that of the husband's primary wife. As a result, she was vulnerable to abuse by the husband. However, this was not according to the covenantal principle that YHWH had established with His people. The abuse and death of the concubine in Judges 19 was also not accepted by the people. This indicates that contrary to modern ideas of an abusive patriarchy always in place in the history of Israel, abuse and violence against women were strongly condemned.

Consequently, to blame the Bible and Biblical patriarchy for the abuse of women in modern societies is on the whole misleading. Under YHWH's covenantal rule, all people were to be treated equally with mutual respect and love. Women could be and were treated with benevolence and respect, as I indicated in the character of Achsah. By juxtaposing the roles and status of Achsah and the concubine, I wanted to showcase the duality in the dominant cultural ideology: benevolent male rule versus malevolent male rule. The former

was the result of the people following YHWH's covenantal principles, the latter the corruption of these covenantal values. The abuse of the concubine and the violence perpetrated against the other women in the Book of Judges (19-21) as well as the abuse of women in modern times is a consequence of values and a belief system that are contrary to God's laws of equality, value and righteousness for all people.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **CONCLUSION**

#### **7.1 WOMEN'S SPECIAL ROLES AND STATUS IN THE PRE-MONARCHIC PERIOD**

At the heart of this dissertation lies the question of whether women held authority and autonomy in the Book of Judges that was reflective of women's roles and status in the pre-monarchic period. I have argued for a benevolent form of patriarchy and women's authority and autonomy in Chapters Two to Five.

The pre-monarchic period was a singular time in the history of the proto-Israelites. It was particularly in this era that women seemed to attain status and authority unparalleled in subsequent epochs. In the pre-monarchic period under the Kingship of YHWH (theocracy), women seemed to have flourished according to the ideals YHWH had in mind for both men and women. Women functioned in a variety of official roles: They were *inter alia* landowners and negotiators, community leaders, prophetesses, judges, lawgivers, (Jdg 1:14-15; 4:4-5; cf Jdg 5:7), wise women (cf Jdg 4:5; 5:29), mothers (Jdg 5: 7; 13; 14:2-5; 17), educators (cf Jdg 14:3) and warriors (Jdg 4:8-9, 12-14, 18-22; 8:54) that served their communities during the pre-monarchic era. In fact, the very occupation of these roles by women in the Book of Judges, for example, negates the idea of the powerless and oppressed female under a patriarchal system (or dominant cultural ideology) that served only the interests of the male (Meyers 2014:21, 23). Women were in control of the household economic processes (see Chapter Five) as well as the household religion (see Chapter Four).

Studies, *inter alia* archaeological research, into the Iron Age I households of the villages of the 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> century BC have revealed that women in the pre-monarchic period had the potential to achieve authority that came from women's specific roles and status (see Ackerman 2003:174-175; cf Meyers 1988:19-20). The pre-monarchic Israelite households were the basic and primary mechanisms for production and consumption. Since economic activities as well as the social and religious behaviour of the household were under women's control and management, women therefore were the backbone of Iron I households and economy (Meyers 1988:145).

## 7.2 REFLECTIONS ON THE METHODOLOGY

To substantiate the arguments mentioned above, I have based this dissertation on previous studies that encompass new theoretical approaches such as socio-anthropological and archaeological methodologies. I have utilised the narratives of the Book of Judges, the primary textual source of the Iron I period, comparative studies and mythology from the ancient Near East, and archaeology as a guide to understand the functions and status of the women in the pre-monarchic period. By means of the Bible and the abovementioned interdisciplinary approach, I have endeavoured to document an account of the lived reality of the women in the era of the Book of Judges. Naturally, the discussions in this study can never definitively fully reveal the lives the women of the Book of Judges.

Through a multi-disciplinary approach, this investigation provides evidence that the productive and reproductive capabilities of women, their autonomy and authority were a solid economic foundation for the establishment of an Israelite state. The multidimensional methodology of this study has also demonstrated that women could attain authority and concomitant status in their households and community. With the abovementioned theoretical methodologies, this study also presents evidence for female equality, status and authority in the religious and economic activities of women in Chapters Four and Five respectively that are not in accordance with mainstream theory (particularly the feminist viewpoint) regarding the dominant cultural ideology or patriarchy as discussed in Chapters One and Two. This study has also demonstrated that a re-construction of a women's history of the premonarchic period will illuminate women's authority and autonomy within a variant form of patriarchy that in my opinion was benevolent.

The use of a multi-disciplinary approach, was an attempt to make the images of the ancient women's daily lives and female reality become more alive and animated, accessible and analogous to women in modern times.

## 7.3 REFLECTIONS ON FEMINIST PERCEPTIONS OF WOMEN'S ROLES AND STATUS IN THE PRE-MONARCHIC PERIOD

In the late nineteenth century, a major shift occurred in the way women read the Bible stories that depict female characters. Instead of the erstwhile redemptive quality found in the narratives, women began to read in them oppressive male rule over women. Since then many academics, in particular feminist scholars, believe that the Old Testament promotes the subjugation of women within a cruel patriarchal system (Nadar 2005). Feminists hold that

women often unnamed are marginalised characters and always subservient to and associated with men.

However, feminist perceptions of women as subservient, powerless and at the persistent behest of men in a tyrannical (and cruel) patriarchy (particularly in the pre-monarchic period) has been in accordance with Meyers (1988:114) declared one-sided in this study. It may also be that scholars have downplayed or excluded female roles in the historical past since the focus was on men's public activities. Because of this, women's authoritative behaviour has largely gone unnoticed and hence the subjugated women of feminist perceptions. A reason for the idea of women as subjugated and helpless, is outdated sociological paradigms of feminist thought that are inadequate to compile true and cohesive realities of women's lives in the Old Testament ([the pre-monarchic period for example] Meyers 2014:9).

Scholars such as Meyers (2014:8-9) are questioning the legitimacy of the patriarchal model to understand women's lives in the Old Testament. Instead of considering Biblical patriarchy and laws as oppressive to women they could be interpreted as part of proto-Israelite traditions and norms, which cannot be understood in modern contexts. Consequently, conventional interpretations of the dominant cultural ideology (patriarchy) and androcentric views obscure the reality of women's authority in pre-monarchic Israel. Another reason for women's overlooked authority is that little research has been conducted into the pre-monarchic household which was the sphere of women's authority and autonomy. Therefore, it is possible that the representation of patriarchal hegemony and authority in the Biblical writings (by feminists and other mainstream scholars) is conceivably only theoretical and not 'reflective of the actual social reality of the household' (Perdue 1997:213).

According to feminists such as Exum (1994:170) the Bible has throughout history promoted the abuse of women. However, the Bible declares justice and righteousness to all people and does not condone the unjust death of women or men. These are always the values expressed in the theology of the Bible. Feminist (perhaps unintentionally) forget that YHWH's covenantal rule promoted the prosperity and equality of all people. This study has demonstrated that it was moral corruption of the pre-monarchic Israelites that turned a benevolent patriarchy (a result of covenantal laws) into a malevolent system not just for women but also men (see 7.8). Subsequently, vestiges of the moral code inherent in YHWH's covenantal rule is still visible in the people's outrage against the death of the concubine which implies that the abuse of women was not the cultural norm. Women could not have been denied their equality and authority next to their male counterparts since the covenant was beneficial to both genders. Accordingly, a benevolent patriarchy existed that allowed men and women's authority to

function parallel to each other in the households particularly. We deduce the powerful role of women in the pre-monarchic period from women such as Achsah (Jdg 1:14-15), Deborah, Jael (Jdg 4-5), the mother of Samson (Jdg 14:2-5), the mother of Micah (Jdg 17:1-4).

To my mind, beginning in the late nineteenth century, these feminist interpretations or readings of the Bible, are not accurate and do not reveal the true reality of the pre-monarchic women as I have determined in this study. Contrary to the negative reading of women's stories in the Bible, some women display autonomous and authoritative behaviour in their cultic activities and the economy of their households. This is in keeping with the spirit of egalitarian principles and authority that I believe undergirded women's lives in the pre-monarchic period.<sup>535</sup>

#### 7.4 WOMEN IN A PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY

In Chapter Two and Three, I have attempted to show that women's authority, though not evident in the Book of Judges, granted them parity with the men in their society. Women had freedom of religious expression. Throughout this study, it has been documented that women's authority and power flourished under a social organisation (see 2.2.2; 2.2.2.1) that was generally benevolent to women and that allowed them their equality. The elements that had a beneficial impact on men and women's interactions and that led to a shared equality sprang

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<sup>535</sup> In my opinion, these 'new' interpretations of women's stories in the Bible reflect the paradoxical nature of the cultural environment women experienced in the late nineteenth century (Styler 2010:9-10). Styler (2010:10-12) describes women's extension of their 'traditional (and Biblical) roles as nurturer, teacher and moral guardian' into the wider society. They followed the guidelines in the Biblical texts, aiding those in need. As these increased activities made women more prominent in the public – the male – domain, women were met with opposition from both religious and cultural attitudes that sought to restrain them. The freedom for women that they read in the Biblical narratives (in particular, the New Testament) was not to be found outside their homes. Naturally, women turned to a scrutiny of those Biblical texts that were used to curtail their activities such as preaching (Styler 2010:10-12). They would impose on those Biblical texts used by the men in their culture to promote their androcentric agenda and selfishness these same qualities. As distressing and unimaginable as some of the stories are (Jdg 11:34-40; 19; 21:23), I believe that (over)emphasising the cruel acts that happened to them denies the women of Jabesh Gilead and Shiloh the rebuilding of their lives, the establishment of an entire new community as well as healing and comfort from their trauma. Given the small population of Benjamites and the overabundance of land, the women might have gained certain wealth, authority and status around which they could forge new lives for themselves and by which they could overcome the previous painful events in their lives. Instead of rising victoriously above their circumstances the women remain perpetually forcibly married and raped, shamed and dishonoured. Although we can never exactly know what the women in the Book of Judges thought of their lived experiences Jephthah's daughter (see 2.4.1.1 e) might have been horrified to have her death labelled as a murder (by Exum 1994:20-21). She might have thought of it as an honourable deed considering the cultural aspects of oath-taking that was part of their daily lives, however misguided and horrible we may find it in modern times (Jdg 11:34-40). Le Roux (2015:505-519) views the interplay between father and daughter as the mutual exchange of kindness, respect and fairness that in general underpins the relationship between men and women in the Book of Judges. Because of their esteem for one another, Achsah and Caleb remained equally in control of a situation that had the potential of culminating in public humiliation for Caleb. Le Roux reads the narrative within the context of benevolence and love that are exercised in the rule of the father in Iron Age I.

from their roles in their households and the community in which egalitarian values were encouraged, as well as the unique environment of the hill country in the pre-monarchic period (see 3.2; 3.2.1; 3.2.1.1; 3.2.1.2; 3.2.1.3 a, b; 3.2.1.4).

#### **7.4.1 Patriarchy as the dominant cultural ideology**

In Chapter Two, I found that although women's lived experiences occurred against the background of frequent war and religious apostasy, violence as well as patriarchy are factors which helped shaped women's lives. Patriarchy was not a social organisation that was malevolent or abusive towards women while the people lived within and followed YHWH's covenantal rule and laws. Under YHWH's covenantal rule, women were afforded the same rights, privileges and equality as men. This resulted in a benevolent patriarchal system since it expressed YHWH's ideal was for both men and women to prosper in their respective roles and shared equality. Contrary to feminist thought, an oppressive patriarchy would have been countermanding the egalitarian values and moral code inherent in the covenantal principles. There are indications of women's authority and autonomy in various narratives related to the pre-monarchic period while some women had an equivalent status to their male counterparts in the public sphere (cf Jdg 1:14-15; 4-5; 14:1-5; 17:1-4). Women's authority and autonomy could not have been possible within a strict patriarchal organizational structure. Accordingly, I believe that women could and did have positions of authority concomitant to men in their community perhaps more than what is recorded in in the Book of Judges. Consequently, patriarchy could not consistently have been a malevolent system of abuse and oppression of women.

#### **7.4.2 Benevolent patriarchy**

I believe that as a result of YHWH's covenantal rule, patriarchy in the pre-monarchic period was atypical and divergent of feminists' perception of male rule. Women's roles and status, were made possible by a variant form of patriarchy that existed in the pre-monarchic period (cf 2.4.1.1 a, b, c). It may, however, be a system that is difficult to define or name (Meyers 2014:8-27; 1988:187). At best, it is a form of patrimonialism that, in my opinion, leans more towards a benevolent form of patriarchy (Meyers 1988:187; see Chapter Two). Whatever its definition, it was this benevolent form of patriarchy that allowed most women to thrive economically and socially in the early Iron Age community of the Book of Judges.

Furthermore, I have concluded in this study that in addition to benevolent patriarchy it was also a heterarchical system in the households (which was a system that valued all positions

and contributions by family members as equally important) that allowed women to achieve the successful roles of authority and status in the domestic and public sphere. In a household organised in a heterarchical system women were allowed their authority and positions of power and status alongside men, albeit in different ways (see 2.2.2; 2.2.2.1; 4.3.4.1; 5.1.1; 5.3.2; Gottwald 2001:171, 301; Meyers 2006:249-250; Benjamin 2015:55-56). I have concluded that benevolent patriarchy and heterarchy may be more evident when a history of women in the pre-monarchic period is reconstructed.

In Chapter Two, I have proposed that the reconstruction of the hidden women's history in the pre-monarchic period should be focused primarily on households where domestic processes were basically under women's control and management. This could demonstrate the power and authority women could and did have in that era and in turn possibly give benevolent patriarchy a more defined character. Consequently, I find that feminists perspectives of early patriarchy are not suitable standards to scrutinize and understand women's lives. When the conventional interpretative structures of patriarchy are removed, authoritative and independent women in the pre-monarchic period emerge. I believe that the roles and status of Deborah (see 2.3.3.3; 4.3.4.1; 4.3.5.1; 4.3.7.1-4.3.7.5; 5.5.2.1 b) and other women (such as Achsah [Jdg 1:14-15]; the mother of Samson (see 4.3.3.1 b; 4.3.4.2; 5.6.3; Jdg 13; 14:2-5); the mother of Micah (see 4.3.5; Jdg 17:1-4); as well as women's autonomous behaviour such as indicated by Jael (4.3.5.1; 4.5.2.3; Jdg 4); the woman from Thebez (Jdg 9:53); and Delilah (see Chapter 6; Jdg 16, for example) cannot be considered within traditional paradigms of malevolent patriarchy and are more in keeping with a benevolent form of male rule.

Finally, the system of equality under YHWH's Kingship (cf Gn 1:28; 2:18; Jos 24:25-26) embraced women and their decision-making powers as it did men. It was YHWH's wish for a relationship of respect and equality in a system – benevolent patriarchy – that valued both men and women in their society and households. However, the people frequently fell short of this ideal, as can be seen in Judges (cf Jdg 19-21).

## 7.5 GENDER RELATIONS IN THE PRE-MONARCHIC PERIOD

In chapter Three, I have investigated gender relations between men and women in the pre-monarchic period. Subsequently, I propose that both gender groups were aware of the value of their productive and reproductive contributions. Overall, the women in the pre-monarchic period assisted with shaping the structure of the Israelite community. Women played a vital role in the stability and socio-economic health of the community. Women, too, could occupy



those roles that are thought of as primarily belonging to men, namely as protectors and guardians of the household and community (see of 3.2.1.3 b). A confluence of inter alia environmental factors (see 3.2.1.2) which seem to have promoted heterarchy (see 2.2.2.1) in the household and those social elements such as egalitarianism (see 3.2.1; 3.2.1.1) appear to have promoted equality between men and women in the pre-monarchic period.

Heterarchical structures and egalitarianism negate Marxist-founded ideas of patriarchy which do not take into account women's specific organisations whereby women organised their productive and reproductive activities within several locations of power and authority – that is the household economy, religion and reproduction spheres. In this manner, women held a considerable amount of authority. The house of the mother and the house of the father functioned parallel to each other with concomitant authority arranged along heterarchical structures. Consequently, class distinctions, as proposed by Marxist theory, which led to women's oppression, in my opinion, were non-existent in the pre-monarchic period for all the above-mentioned reasons (see 3.1.3.1 a; 3.1.3.2 a, b, c, d).

## 7.6 WOMEN'S CULTIC ROLES AND STATUS

In Chapter Four, I discussed women's cultic activities in the official religion, the foreign cult and the household cult. Consequently, I have concluded that the various cultic tasks women performed in their worship of YHWH as well as their syncretic religious activities allowed them to acquire positions of authority and hold positions of high status in their household and public spheres. Women possessed religious freedom. Women lived a full religious existence in which they had diverse roles and many equivalent rights and tasks to the men in the cultic congregation (Bird 1999:3-20). The offices of judge and prophet were open to women allowing them leadership positions and concomitant authority. Women's cultic positions were as essential to the stability of their community as their economic roles in pre-monarchic Israelite society. The manifestation of women's sacred beliefs in their ritualistic worship of supernatural power(s) assured sacred and secular behaviour that stabilised the tumultuous society of early Israel.

Women's cultic contributions at the Tabernacle, for example, were essential to the effective management and smooth functioning of the Tabernacle at Shiloh and therefore the official religion could offer a perfect counterbalance to the trauma and difficulties suffered by people because of the frequent unrests and their harsh lives on the Hill Country. In all probability, it was women's cultic activities that played a significant role in the sacred lives and continuation of the Israelite community. Another element that played an important role in

the lives of the pre-monarchic people was the worship of the foreign gods Baal and Asherah. These fertility gods emphasised worship by means of the physical body, in fertility rites and cultic rituals and festivities that appealed to the sensual nature of the people (see 4.4-4.5.4) and to secure the fertility of the land and household. However misguided, the women probably transferred the covenantal principles into their syncretic cults and in doing so could bring about order in their communities (see 4.2.1.1-4.2.1.2). A consequence of breaking the covenant with YHWH was a syncretic worship on the high places in pre-monarchic Israel where women worshipped YHWH and possibly other deities on the high places (see 4.3.8-4.3.8.4). Women could have been attracted to this type of worship since they could possibly assume the role of priestesses of a Canaanite deity in their sanctuaries on the high places (see 4.5-4.5.3.4), an office from which they were excluded from in the official religion at Shiloh. In addition to vow-making rituals and offerings, cultic behaviour such as pilgrimages to the Tabernacle at Shiloh, and possibly to a temple of Baal, such as the one in Shechem regulated people's lives and might have brought about certain status and authority to the (female) pilgrim as it is still the custom today in Middle Eastern societies.

It is also possible that women could officiate as priestesses in their household cult. I believe that it was possible for women to gain authority in the hybrid religion practised in their households because the domestic cult was under their control and management (see 4.6). The women's specific religion in the household probably centred *inter alia* on their fertility and reproductive needs and thus they would have infused these aspects of their lives with magic-religious rituals. Women could recreate their houses into a sacred dimension in which there was ample space for the matriarch to be the leader of a women's religion. In the household religion women acquired concomitant status and authority to men's religious roles in public.

## 7.7 WOMEN'S ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES AND STATUS

In Chapter Five it was discovered that women acquired authority and influence in their households and community through various economic behaviours and processes. Women possessed economic freedom. Being wives and mothers were the primary axis of women's existence in the pre-monarchic period. Women's productive and reproductive capabilities were vital to the economic demands of a subsistence farming community. These duties were mainly performed in their households and include farming, food preparation and cooking as well as weaving activities (see 5.6-5.8.6.4). It was apparently their dwellings, the four-room houses, that reflected an egalitarian spirit among the residents and community. These factors were in effect healthy to the mindset of women and men (see 5.2.2-5.2.3.3). During times of hostile

enemy attacks the people hid from their enemies in shelters, caves and strongholds where it may have been possible for women to resume an ordinary routine since they may have taken their grind stones and possibly looms as well as their food preparation and cooking utensils with them (see 5.2.4; 5.2.4.1).

Theocracy and a benevolent patriarchal social organisation allowed the *bêt ĕm* (house of the mother) to have a corresponding and unifying authority alongside the *bêt āb*. The domestic unit of the woman was the economic powerbase of the entire household and completely under a woman's sphere of control. Women acquired authority centred on: power related to women's management of multifaceted household skills and tools; power created by the individual woman's sense of her own confidence and worth; and power gained by women as a group in their informal networks that resulted in a political effect on their society (Meyers 2002b:14-44; cf Meyers 1997a:1-47; 1998:251-262; 1999a:33-44; 2003b:425-444; 2006:245-254). Women's economic contributions to the pre-monarchic households probably led to a substantial amount of power for them that could sustain the Israelite economy in times of economic, political and social stress. Women could also achieve status in her household and community through marriage and childbearing. A woman's reproductive capabilities were therefore of prime importance to her. Through her children she secured the survival of her family line. Thus, children were vital to the continuance of the community, their customs and traditions. They were also important to the economic survival of households. The more children a wife had, the more hands the farm or household had to accomplish farming and household tasks. Through the education of her children, the cultural and economic aspects of the household was safeguarded. The various skills that a mother taught her daughters elevated the productivity of the household, which in return solidified and mother's status and authority in the family.

## 7.8 THE ROLES AND STATUS OF THE HARLOT AND THE CONCUBINE

In Chapter Six, I discussed harlotry as a role that certain women chose in their lived experience and which was tolerated in the pre-monarchic society. It is possible that women chose this type of 'vocation' for not only economic reasons but also to express their sexual autonomy and their sexuality as in the age of the 1960s. It seems that the role of the harlot in the pre-monarchic period involved the transmission of certain types of knowledge and that the association with upper-class harlots might have been an elevation in status for some men. Apparently, harlots could impact on the history of a nation, as reported in Judges (cf Jdg 16).

I have concluded that the Bible does not promote the subjugation of women as has been maintained in modernity. As mentioned previously, scholars often do not consider the covenantal rule of YHWH during which He desired both men and women to enjoy equal privileges (see 7.3; 7.4-7.4.2). Women had sexual ‘freedom’. Ruether (1984:16) comments that social arguments surrounding female subjugation and male dominance in Genesis and feminist theory concerning the definition of God cannot justify the Deity as supporting male primacy. Indeed, God’s ideal, which is equality between the man and woman, is expressed in Genesis 1:28 and 2:18 (as well the Abrahamic covenant; cf Gn 17:15, for example).

The incidents of crimes committed against women in the Book of Judges are not the consequences of a brutal and misogynist patriarchal system. According to the Book of Judges, it was the deterioration of the covenantal relationship between YHWH and His people that led to the death of the concubine and the abuse of the other women in Judges. It was the result of the abuse of power by cowardly, corrupt and degenerate men within an equally morally bankrupt social environment, which is the scourge of every society throughout history. I believe that it is certain human behaviour related to the events in Judges 19-21 that needs to be intensely scrutinised. Judges 17:6; 21:25 declares that everyone did as they pleased which signifies the breakdown of the religious, moral and social fibre of the community. The people’s outcry against the death of the concubine reveal that not all was lost to immorality. The people’s outrage against the horrific crime reveal that this was not the cultural norm since it contradicted the covenantal law.

The stories of the women in the Book of Judges are not stories that teach us to hate, disrespect, abuse or treat women as second-class citizens. Both men and women can learn valuable lessons from these women about how to live or not to live their lives. South African women can, in the same way that the women in the pre-monarchic period impacted on their history and religion, impact upon our own. The leadership positions, wisdom and faith of Deborah, the trust of the mother of Samson in YHWH, the forgiving spirit of the mother of Micah for example, serve as models upon which we can base our lives. In the South African context where religion is still very much part of our day-to-day lives, the most important lesson we can learn from the people in the pre-monarchic period is to live within the boundaries of respect and protection (see Leeb 200:141) that God’s love and laws provide.

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### Abbreviations

ABR	Associates for Biblical Research
AJA	American Journal of Archaeology
AP	Apologetics Press
ASOR	The American Schools of Oriental Research
AYBD	The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary
BA	The Biblical Archaeologist
BAR	Biblical Archaeology Review
BAS	Biblical Archaeological Society
BASOR	Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research
BHD	Bible History Daily
CBQ	The Catholic Biblical Quarterly
DTIB	Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible
DODDB	Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible
EBD	Easton's Bible Dictionary
EC	The Encyclopedia of Christianity
EDB	Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible
EDT	Evangelical Dictionary of Theology
EJ	Encyclopedia Judaica
HCBD	The Harper Collins Bible Dictionary
ISBE	The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia
ISV	International Standard Version
IEJ	Israel Exploration Journal
JAOS	Journal of the American Oriental Society
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
JE	The Jewish Encyclopedia
JETS	Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society
JSB	The Jewish Study Bible
JNES	Journal of Near Eastern Studies
JS	Journal for Semitics

JSOT	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
MDB	Mercer Dictionary of the Bible
NEA	Near Eastern Archaeology
NIV	New International Version
NKJV	New King James Version
NUBD	The New Unger's Bible Dictionary
OBC	The Oxford Bible Commentary
OCB	The Oxford Companion to the Bible
QD	Quaestiones Disputatae
VT	Vetus Testamentum
WA	World Archaeology
ZIBD	Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary

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